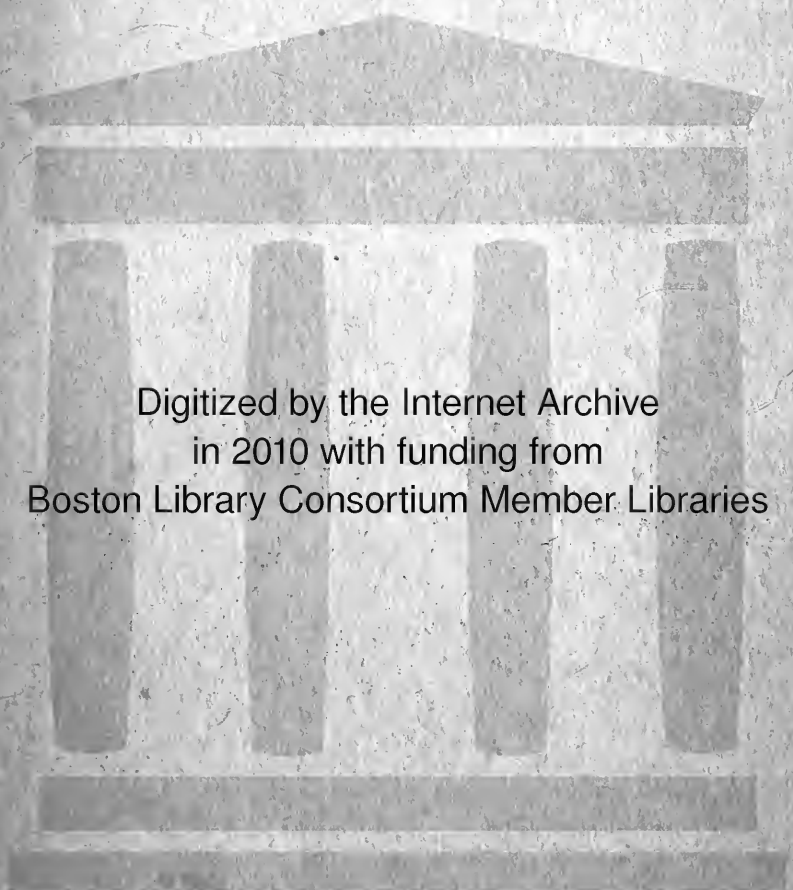


EARLE WAYNE'S
NOBILITY

by

MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON



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EARLE WAYNE'S NOBILITY

By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

AUTHOR OF

“Brownie’s Triumph,” “Virgie’s Inheritance,”
“Nora,” “Trixy,” “Stella Roosevelt,”
“Wedded by Fate,” Etc.



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EARLE WAYNE'S NOBILITY

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CHAPTER I

SENTENCE OF THE COURT

"GUILTY!"

The deep, sonorous voice of the foreman of the jury sounded out upon the solemn stillness of the crowded courtroom like the knell of doom.

And doom it was, and to one who never consciously committed a mean act in all his life.

The effect which that one word produced was marked.

There was a rustle of excitement and disapproval among the crowd, while deep-drawn sighs and expressions of sorrow showed that sympathy was strong for the prisoner at the bar, who for the last hour, while the jury was absent to decide upon the verdict, had sat with bent head and listless attitude, as if wearied out with the bitter trial to which he had been subjected.

Now, however, as he had been commanded "to look upon the jury," his head was proudly lifted, revealing an exceedingly intelligent and handsome face, and a pair of fine dark eyes met those of the foreman unflinchingly while the least smile of scorn and bitterness disturbed the firm, strong mouth, showing that he had believed he had not much to hope for from him.

As the word was spoken which sealed his fate, a gray pallor settled over his face, and he dropped into his former attitude; otherwise he betrayed no sign of emotion.

Then something occurred which very seldom occurs in a crowded court-room.

A low cry of pain not far from the prisoner made every eye turn that way, and made him shiver as with a sudden chill.

A tender, sorrowful gleam crept into his dark eyes, the proud lips unbent and trembled slightly, and a heavy sigh heaved his broad chest.

The next moment a slender, girlish form started up from

her seat, and a fair, flushed face was turned with eloquent pleading toward the grave judge, sitting like a statue in his chair of state, while an earnest, quivering voice rang out:

"Oh, sir, he is *not guilty*—I know that Earle Wayne *never was* guilty of such a deed."

A touching picture, and very sweet and attractive withal, Editha Dalton made, standing there so unconscious of herself, or that *she* was guilty of any breach of decorum; her fair hair floating like gleams of sunlight upon her graceful shoulders, her sweet face flushed and full of pain, her deep blue eyes filled with tears and raised beseechingly to the judge, her delicate hands clasped imploringly and half-outstretched toward him, as if seeking for mercy in the sentence he was about to pronounce.

The old man's face lost its habitual sternness for a moment, and his own eyes softened almost to tenderness, as he caught the sweet tones, and turned to look upon her, so beautiful in her appealing attitude.

It was not often that a culprit found one so earnest and beautiful to plead his cause. The able lawyer who had had charge of the case for the young man, with all his eloquence, had not moved him as did this fair maiden, with her flushed, pained face, her pleading eyes, her outstretched hands.

A murmur of sympathy sounded again throughout the room, and a wave of regret swept over the judge's heart as he turned from the girl to the prisoner, feeling himself more than half convinced of the truth of her words, as he marked again the noble face and the honest expression of the clear, unflinching eyes.

But some one pulled Editha Dalton hastily back into the chair from which she had arisen, and a stern voice uttered in her ear:

"Edie! Edie! sit down, child! What *are* you thinking of, when your own evidence did more toward convicting him than that of any one else?"

"Oh! I know it! I know it! but he is *not guilty* all the same. It is only the cruel force of circumstances that makes him appear so!" she sobbed, wildly, burying her face, with a gesture of despair, in her handkerchief.

The judge's keen ears caught the words, and his sharp eyes wandered again from her to the prisoner, a shade of uneasiness in their glance. He marked the pallor that had overspread his face, making him almost ghastly; the yearning, troubled look in the eyes now fixed so sadly upon the weeping girl; the firmly compressed lips and clenched hands,

which told of a mighty effort at self-control and something whispered within him that the jury was at fault—that the evidence, though so clear and conclusive, was at fault and, since there could be no reprieve, to make the sentence as light as possible.

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up," he said, and Earle Wayne instant arose.

Tall, manly, and with conscious dignity, he confronted the judge to receive his sentence, his eye never faltering, his face calm and proud, though still exceedingly pale.

"You have heard the verdict of the jury—have you anything to say?"

"Nothing, save what I have already said, your honor. *I am not guilty of the crime with which I am charged, and if I live I will yet prove it!*"

That was all; but the firm, unfaltering words seemed to carry conviction with them, and even the jury began to look grave and troubled, as if they, too, feared they had convicted an innocent man.

But the fiat had gone forth, and the judge, anxious to have the uncomfortable matter disposed of, pronounced the lightest sentence possible—"three years' hard labor in the State prison at —."

A mighty sigh burst from the multitude, as if it had come from a single breast, as he ceased, and then a hush like death pervaded the room. It was the best the judge could do, and the very least they could expect; but it was sad to see a promising young man of twenty condemned to penal servitude for a term of years, be it ever so few.

The prisoner received it with the same calmness that had characterized him throughout the trial, only a slight quivering of the eyelids showing that he had heeded the words at all.

A moment of utter silence pervaded the room after the sentence was pronounced, the court was dismissed, and then the curious but sympathetic rabble went its way.

But, with winged feet, a slight form darted forward from the crowd, and, almost before he was aware of her presence, Editha Dalton was beside the prisoner, her pained, quivering face upraised to his.

She seized his hand in both of hers, she laid her hot, flushed cheek upon it, and sobbed:

"Oh, Earle, forgive me! forgive me! but I *had* to tell the truth, and it has ruined you."

"Hush, Edie—Miss Dalton. You have done perfectly right, and I have nothing to forgive."

The young man spoke kindly, soothingly, but a sudden flush mounted to his brow, and the hot cheek against his hand thrilled him with a bitter pain.

"But it was my evidence that told most against you. I tried not to tell it all; but, oh! they made me, with their cruel questions. If I had not had to say that I *saw* you, and that the bracelet was mine, perhaps, oh! *perhaps* that dreadful jury would not have said you were——"

She stopped suddenly and shuddered, sobbing bitterly.

She could not speak the obnoxious word.

"Their *saying* that I am guilty does not *make* me so, even though I must pay the penalty as if I were. But I have the consciousness *within* that I am innocent of the crime, and I shall live to prove it yet to you, Editha, and to all the world," he answered, in clear, confident tones, with a proud unlifting of his head.

"You do not *need* to prove it to me, Earle; I *know* it already. I would take your word in the face of the whole world and a thousand juries," Editha asserted, with unshaken confidence.

A glad light leaped into the young man's eyes, and illuminated his whole face for the moment, at these words.

"Thank you," he replied, in low, thrilling tones, and beding toward her: "it will be very pleasant to remember what you have said while I am——"

He stopped short—he could not finish the miserable sentence.

His sudden pause reminded the young girl anew of what was to come.

"Earle! Earle!" she cried, passionately, her face growing white and agonized, "I *cannot* have it so! Three years! three long, long, wretched years! Oh, if I could only *do* something! If I could only find those wretches who did the deed for which *you* must suffer; if—oh, it is too, too cruel!"

"Hush, my little friend!" he said, bending nearer and speaking with deep tenderness; "your sympathy is very sweet and comforting to me, but it will unman me if I see you suffer so on my account."

"Then I will be calm. I am thoughtless to wound you, when you have so much to bear already," she interrupted, choking back the sobs that heaved her breast, and making an effort to be calm.

His lip trembled slightly as her blue eyes met his, so full of sympathy and sorrow.

"God knows that this *is* a fearful trial to me," he went on, drawing a deep breath, to free himself of the

choking sensation in his throat; but, trying to speak more hopefully: "I am young, and three years will soon pass. I shall spend them to some purpose, too; and, Editha, with the knowledge of *your* trust and faith in me, I shall be able to bear them patiently, and I shall come forth from the strange discipline better prepared, I have no doubt, to battle with life than I am at this moment. Every hour that is my own I shall spend in study; and, if *you* will continue to have faith in me, I promise you shall never have cause to blush to own me as a friend in the future."

"Earle," Editha replied, quietly, yet earnestly, now entirely self-possessed, "you are just as brave and noble as you can be, and I am proud of you as my friend to-day—now—this moment! I shall think of you every day; I shall *pray* for you every day; and, if they will let me, I will come once in a while to see you."

"No, *no*; please do not, Edie. I could not bear that *you* should see me *there*," he cried, sharply, his face almost convulsed with pain at the thought.

"Ah, no—I did not think; but you *would* not like it; but I want to do *something* to comfort you and let you know that I do not forget you," she said, sadly, a troubled look on her fair face. "Will they let me send you things?" she asked, after thinking a moment.

"Yes, that is allowed, I believe."

"Then I shall send you something as often as I can; and you will be comforted a little, will you not, Earle, if you know you are remembered?" she asked, anxiously.

"Indeed I shall," he said, deeply touched. "If I receive a flower, a book, a paper, even, I shall be greatly cheered."

"You shall have them. Every week I will send you something, and you will know that there is one true friend who has faith in you," she said, eagerly.

"God bless you, Miss Dalton. You are a little comforter, and my heart is lighter already. I have another friend—your uncle; he has been very kind, and has fought hard for me."

"Dear Uncle Richard! I believe he *is* one of the best men that ever lived," Editha said, as her eyes sought a noble-looking man who was talking in an earnest and somewhat excited manner to a group gathered about him, and who had been Earle's lawyer.

"I shall ever have cause to remember him gratefully. He did not give me much encouragement regarding the issue of the case—the evidence was so strong against me—and as we could get no clew to the real culprit, he feared the

worst. But he promised to help me in my studies, should the case go against me, so that I may be ready for the bar when the term expires. So you see that things are not quite so dark as they might be," Earle said, trying to speak hopefully.

Editha sighed.

The future looked dark enough at the best, she thought.

"If we could but have had more time—if you might only have another trial. Could you not have appealed, Earle?" she asked.

He shook his head sadly

"It could have done no good. The really guilty ones have covered their tracks, and hidden their booty so effectually, that we could get no clue. But do not grieve for me, my little friend. Other innocent men have suffered for the guilty, and it can be no harder for me than it was for them. And," lowering his voice, and speaking reverently, "I do not forget that there was once a Man who suffered for the sins of a *whole world*. For thirty-four years He meekly bore His cross, praying at the end that His enemies might be forgiven; and since He sees fit to send this one upon me, I must not murmur, though I own 'tis hard."

Editha was weeping quietly now. The tears would come in spite of her, though she marveled at his words.

"Come, Editha, I have an engagement at four, and it lacks only fifteen minutes of that hour now."

The words were spoken in cold, measured tones at her side.

The fair girl started, flushed, and glanced around at the speaker in surprise, as if unaccustomed to being addressed in that manner.

"Yes, papa, I will come; but I wanted to say good-by to Earle."

"Ah, yes—ahem! I'm truly sorry for poor Earle," Mr. Dalton said, addressing him with a good deal of coldness and a very poor show of sympathy, while he glanced impatiently at his daughter. "Very unfortunate complication of circumstances," he went on, his gold repeater in his hand, and his eyes watching attentively the minute hand as it crept toward the hour of his engagement. "The evidence was strangely conclusive, and I wish for *your* sake it could have been refuted; but really, Editha, we must not delay longer."

Earle Wayne bowed coldly to the would-be comforter, and stepped back as if to end the interview.

He knew Mr. Dalton was no friend to him, and his words, which contained no sincerity, were intolerable to him.

"Good-by, Miss Dalton," he said, holding out his hand to Editha, and which she had dropped upon hearing Mr. Dalton's stern tones.

That gentleman frowned darkly at the act.

What right had a criminal to offer his hand to *his* daughter?

"Good-bye, Earle," she answered, clasping it warmly, while a big tear trickled down her cheek and dropped hot and burning upon it.

Then she turned quickly away, drew her vail over her tear-stained face, while Mr. Dalton led her from the room, himself bestowing only an indifferent nod upon the offending culprit.

CHAPTER II

THE ROBBERY

ABOUT three months previous to the events related in the preceding chapter, on a dark and stormy night, two men might have been seen prowling around a stately mansion in an aristocratic portion of the city of New York. After carefully reconnoitering the premises, to see that no one was stirring within, one of them cautiously proceeded to cut out a pane of glass in one of the basement windows, while the other kept watch upon the sidewalk.

The glass was removed without the slightest noise, whereupon the burglar unfastened the window and lifted the sash. Then making a little noise like the twittering of a sparrow, he was immediately joined by his companion, and both disappeared within the house.

A few minutes later a third man coming along the street, saw the sudden glimmer of a light in one of the lower rooms of the mansion.

Something about it instantly attracted his attention.

It was a quick, sharp flare, and then seemed to go suddenly out.

He waited a minute or two, and the same thing was repeated.

"Aha! a burglar!" he muttered to himself. "I think I'll have to look into this thing."

He stopped, and his first impulse was to turn and go in search of a policeman.

Ah! if he had done so how much of future misery would have been saved him.

But upon second thought he concluded not to do so, and quietly slipped within the shadow of the great porch over the front entrance.

It seemed a long time that he stood waiting there, and he regretted that he had not gone for an officer.

He did not know how long the burglars had been there, and he had feared they would escape before he could return. But finally he heard cautious steps approaching from the rear toward the corner where he was stationed, and now he caught the sound of exultant whispers, that they had been so successful as to get out undiscovered with their rich booty.

The next instant two men emerged into view, bearing their plunder in a bag between them.

With a bound the new-comer darted forward and felled one man to the ground with a blow that sounded like the descent of a sledge-hammer, and then grappled with the other.

The burglar who had been felled had been only momentarily stunned, and, almost instantly recovering himself, he had quietly picked up the bag, which had also fallen to the ground in the melee, and made off with it, leaving his companion to shift for himself as best he could.

The combatants fought bravely and well, but the assailant being lighter than the burglar, and less experienced in pugilistic practice, gradually lost ground, and finally a well-directed blow from his antagonist laid him flat at his feet, when he, also, beat a hasty retreat, having first dropped something on the ground beside his victim.

Steps were now heard approaching upon the pavement; the noise of the scuffle had reached the ears of one of the protectors of the peace, and he was hastening to the rescue.

A light at the same time appeared at a window in one of the lower rooms of the mansion so lately robbed, while above a sash was thrown hastily up, and a slight, white-robed figure leaned forth into the night.

The light in the window below streamed directly out upon the fallen hero—alas! a hero no longer—who now began to gather himself and his scattered senses together once more. As he awoke to his feet a cry from above rang out on the stillness of the night.

"Oh, Earle! Earle! how came you here, and what is the matter?"

The voice was that of Editha Dalton, and, springing

forward under the window, the young man replied, reassuringly:

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Editha. I have had a fall, but am all right now. I'll come and tell you to-morrow how I happened to be here to-night."

"So, so, my fine young gentleman, you'll come and tell the lady to-morrow, will you? I'm thinking mayhaps you will have a chance to tell some one else by that time, you disturber of the peace;" and, before Earle Wayne could scarcely realize what had happened, a pair of steel bracelets were slipped about his wrists, and he was a prisoner.

"You have made a mistake, sir," he said civilly, to his captor, yet beginning to feel very uncomfortable in the position wherein he found himself. "I was trying to stop a couple of thieves who had just robbed this house, when one of them knocked me down and cleared."

"Yes, yes; I find I always get hold of the wrong rogue—some one else does the deed and the one I catch is always so 'innocent,'" laughed the policeman, with good-natured sarcasm. "Aha! what have we here?" he cried again, as his foot came in contact with some glittering object and sent it spinning on before him.

He stooped to pick it up, and, as the light fell upon it, he saw it was a costly bracelet, set with a solitary diamond surrounded with emeralds.

"That looks 'innocent,' don't it now?" he said, holding it up to the light with a chuckle.

"That is Miss Dalton's bracelet; I've seen her wear it," the young man thoughtlessly and injudiciously admitted.

"Oh, yes, no doubt; and you thought mayhaps that them glittering stones might bring a pretty little sum. I came just in time to stop this little game. Come, I think I can accommodate you with lodgings to-night, my hearty."

At this moment a man came out of the house upon the balcony in great excitement.

"Help! help!" he cried. "I've been robbed! Stop thief! stop——"

"Ay, I *have* stopped him, and just in the nick of time, sir," responded the policeman, leading Earl into view.

"*Earle Wayne!*" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, in greatest astonishment, as his glance fell upon him.

"Yes, sir, it is I; but I am no thief, as you very well know."

"No, this does not look like it!" interrupted the policeman, flourishing the bracelet conspicuously.

"I have committed no robbery," asserted Earle, with quiet

dignity; "and I did not see that bracelet until you picked it up and showed it to me. It must have been dropped by one of the robber, who fled after I was knocked down;" and he went on to explain how he happened to be there, and what he had seen and heard.

"It's a likely story now, isn't it, sir," sneered his captor, who was all too eager for the *eclat* of having captured the perpetrator of so daring a theft, "when I've found him with his booty right here on the spot?"

"Mr. Dalton," Earle appealed, fearing he had got himself into a bad predicament, "you know well enough that I would do no such a thing, particularly in this house of all others;" and he glanced in a troubled way up at that white-robed figure in the window.

"No, certainly not. Papa, we know *Earle* would not be guilty of any thing of the kind, and I believe every word he has said about the encounter with those men," Miss Dalton asserted, confidently.

"Did you see or hear any one else, Editha?" asked her father.

"No; I heard a heavy fall, and after listening a minnte I came to the window, where I saw Earle just getting up from the ground; and see! as the light shines upon him he looks as if he had been having an encounter with some one;" and she pointed at the young man's disarranged and soiled clothing.

But Mr. Dalton shook his head, while the policeman sneered. It looked bad, and the presence of the bracelet seemed to them indisputable proof that he was in some way criminally connected with the affair.

Further investigation proved that a quantity of silver, and all of Mrs. Dalton's diamonds, together with quite a large sum of money, had been stolen.

Young Wayne was closely questioned as to who his accomplices were, for the policeman insisted that he must have had one or more.

"Make a clean breast of it, young one, and being your first attempt, perhaps they will let you off easy," he said.

But Earle indignantly refused to answer any more questions, and was at last led away to the station-house and locked up until his case could be officially investigated.

The morning papers were full of the robbery, and the young man's name figured largely in their columns, while much was said about the "culpable hardihood and stubbornness of one so young in years, but apparently so old in crime."

A day or two after the case was investigated, and, no further light being gained upon the affair, he was committed for trial.

Richard Forrester, a lawyer of note and a brother of Mrs. Dalton, in whose employ the young man had been for the past three years, immediately gave bonds for him to the amount of ten thousand dollars, and for the next three months devoted himself assiduously to working up the complicated case.

The day for Earle Wayne's trial came, and only the following facts came to light:

His character, up to the night in question, as far as any one knew, was unimpeachable.

He had been in Mr. Forrester's employ for three years, and during that time had gained that gentleman's entire confidence and kind regard, and he had even contemplated making him a partner in his business as soon as he had completed his course of study and been admitted to the bar.

He spoke at some length, and in glowing terms, of his honesty and industry, and said he had deemed him, if anything, *too* rigid and morbidly conscientious upon what seemed to him points of minor importance.

All this spoke well for the prisoner, but it did not touch upon the matter under consideration, and could not therefore be accepted as evidence.

It seems that on the afternoon before the robbery Earle had asked permission to go out of town on business for himself. He had not stated what that business was, neither had Mr. Forrester inquired.

Now, however, the question came up, but Earle refused to state it, and this of itself turned the tide strong against him.

He had obtained leave to leave the city on a train that left at two in the afternoon, and had gone to the village of —, only eighteen miles out.

He transacted his business, which concerned only his private interests, he said, and this much he could also say, "was connected with the events of his early life," and returned to the city by the late train, which arrived about midnight.

On his way from the station to his lodgings he was obliged to pass Mr. Dalton's house, where he saw, as already described, the light within one of the lower rooms.

He stated that his first impulse was to go for a police officer, but fearing the man—he had not thought there would be more than one—would be off with his booty before he

could return, he resolved to remain, encounter the villain single-handed, and bring him to justice.

He then went on to describe his tussle with the two ruffians.

But he had only his own word with which to battle all the evidence against him. His story did not sound reasonable, the jury thought, particularly as he so persistently refused to state the nature of his business to the village of —; and besides, the fact of the bracelet having been found in his possession, or what amounted to the same thing, was almost sufficient of itself to convict him.

"Earle, if you could only tell this business of yours, perhaps we might be able to do something for you; otherwise I see no chance," Mr. Forrester had urged, when the opposing counsel had made such a point of his refusal to do so.

"I cannot, sir. It is connected with a great wrong committed years ago, and involves the name of my mother. I *cannot* unveil the past before the curious rabble gathered here—no, not even if I have to serve out a ten-years' sentence for keeping silent," Earle said, firmly, but with deep emotion.

Editha's evidence—since she was the first to see and recognize him on the night of the robbery—went further than almost anything else toward condemning him, even though it was given with such reluctance, together with her oft-asserted belief that he was innocent.

The tender-hearted, loyal girl would rather have had her tongue paralyzed than to have been obliged to speak the words which so told against him.

Earle was cross-examined and recross-questioned, but he told the same story every time, never swerving in a single particular from his first statements.

Every possible way was tried to make him confess who his accomplices were, the opposing counsel maintaining that he must have had one or more. But he always replied:

"I had no accomplice, for I have neither planned nor executed any robbery."

"But you assert that two men came out of the house."

"I encountered two men at the corner of Mr. Dalton's house; one I surprised and felled to the ground, and then grappled with the other. During the scuffle the first one got up and ran off with the bag which contained their booty. I then received a blow which stunned and felled me, and when I came to myself again both were gone. I know nothing of either them or their plunder, and I am innocent of any complicity in the matter."

But all was of no avail against the positive evidence which opposed him, and the fatal verdict was spoken, the fearful sentence pronounced.

Popular sympathy inclined strongly toward the unfortunate young man, whom many knew and respected for his hitherto stainless character, while his appearance, so noble and manly, prepossessed almost every one in his favor.

As before stated, he had come to Richard Forrester when a youth of seventeen, asking for work, and the great lawyer had employed him as an office boy, and it was not long before he came to feel a deep interest in the intelligent lad. He saw that he had what lawyers term "a long head," and could grasp all the details of a case almost as readily as he himself could, and he resolved that he would educate him for the profession.

Mr. Forrester was a bachelor of great wealth, and exceedingly fond of his beautiful and vivacious niece, Editha Dalton, who, report said, was to be his heiress.

She was a slight, sprightly girl of fourteen when Earle Wayne came into her uncle's employ, and a mutual admiration sprang up between them at once, and steadily increased, until, on the part of the young man, it grew into a deep and abiding love, although he had never presumed to betray it by so much as a look or tone.

Editha, at seventeen, had not as yet analyzed her own feelings toward her uncle's *protege*; and thus we find her at the time of the trial pouring out her impulsive regrets and grief in the most unreserved manner, while her tender heart was filled with keenest anguish at the fate of her *beau ideal* of all manly excellence.

As for Mr. Dalton, he did not share the faith of either his daughter or his brother-in-law; and, notwithstanding he was vastly astonished upon discovering Earle Wayne in the hands of a policeman at his own door on the night of the robbery, yet he was a man who could easily believe almost anything of one whom he disliked.

He did dislike Earle, simply because Editha showed him so much favor; and he was rather glad than otherwise now, if the truth were known, that this very fascinating young hero was to be removed from his path, even though he was to become a prisoner. He began to fear that she had already grown to admire him more than was either wise or proper, considering the vast difference in their relative social positions; and it would never do for the aristocratic Miss Dalton, heiress-expectant, to fall in love with an *office boy*.

And so Earle Wayne went to prison.

But he went with a stout heart and a manly courage that very few possess who are doomed to drag out a weary term of years behind bolts, and bars, and solid walls.

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND IN NEED

"I DID not do it. I have not *that* on my conscience to weigh me down. I am to suffer for another's crime, and though it is a bitter trial, yet it is better so than that I was really guilty and could go free. I had rather be in my place, dreadful as it is, than in that of the real thief, and I will make my misfortune serve me a good turn in spite of all. I will fit myself for the very highest position in life, and then, when my three years are ended, *I will go out and occupy it*. I will not be crushed. I will rise above the disgrace. I will live it down, and men shall yet be *proud to call me friend*."

So mused our hero as, for the first day in — prison, he was doomed, according to the rules of that institution, to solitary confinement.

Earle Wayne's was no weak nature, to yield himself up to useless repining and vain regrets.

The die was cast, and for the next three years he was to be like any other criminal, and dead to all the world, except that portion of it contained within those four dreary walls, and the one or two outside who should continue faithful to him. Nothing could help it now, unless the real thieves should confess their crime, which they were not at all likely to do, and he bravely resolved to make the best of his situation, hard though it was.

He went cheerfully to his work; he uttered no complaint, he sought no sympathy, and improved every hour that he could call to his own to the utmost.

Richard Forrester proved himself "a friend in need" at this dark time. Obtaining permission of the authorities, he stocked a book-case for Earle with everything needful to complete a thorough course of study, and drafted a plan for him to follow.

Once in three months he visited him, and between each visit he received from him a synopsis of what knowledge he had acquired during that time, which he criticised and

returned with many useful hints, and then, when he came, talked it all over with him.

He was surprised during his visits to see how thorough and clear he was upon all points which he had been over.

"Earle, my boy," he said, at one time, "you will make a better lawyer than I, and I do not see where you find time for all that you have learned."

"I have nothing to distract my mind here, you know, and *I will not brood over my fate*," he replied, with a sad smile, "so it is easy to concentrate my thoughts, and I learn rapidly."

"How much better it would be for all these poor fellows here if they could do the same, and be prepared for a better life when their time is out," said Mr. Forrester, reflectively.

"Most of them, instead, are only laying plans for more desperate deeds than they have ever yet been guilty of; and I begin to think that these severe measures of the law, instead of reforming men, only tend to arouse their antagonism and make them worse," Earle answered.

"But what would you do with them? They have violated the laws and must be made to suffer for it in some way."

"That is true; if they do mischief they must be put where they will be restrained; but in order to reform them, and create a desire within them for higher and better things, I think only such men as are actuated by the highest principles—men who are honest, brave, and true—should be allowed as officers within the walls of a prison. No man can accomplish any *real* good where he is not respected, and there is no one in the world so quick and keen to detect a fraud as these criminals. There are a few men here who are just in the right place—men who would not be guilty of a mean or dishonorable act, and who, while they treat every one with kindness, and even courtesy, yet demand exact and unhesitating obedience. It is astonishing, and sometimes amusing, to observe how differently they are respected and treated from the others."

"You believe, then, that these men might be reformed by kindness and judicious treatment?"

"I do," Earle replied, gravely; "of course there are exceptions, but I really would like to see the power of true, disinterested kindness tried upon some of these reckless fellows."

In after years he did see it tried, and of the result we have yet to tell.

* * * * *

Upon leaving the court-room with her father, after bid-

ding Earle good-by, Editha appeared very much disturbed and kept shooting indignant glances from beneath her veil at her unconscious companion.

At last, when they were seated in their carriage, and rolling smoothly toward home, her wrath broke forth.

"Papa, I think it was real shabby of you not to shake hands with Earle, and express a little genuine sympathy for him."

"I do not know as I particularly desire to shake hands with, or that I experience any great amount of 'genuine' sympathy for, the man who is supposed to have robbed me," returned Mr. Dalton, with exasperating indifference.

"Papa Dalton! you *know* Earle Wayne did not rob you as well as I do," Editha said, her eyes sparkling angrily; for the sweet little maiden *could* show anger upon occasion. "And as for myself," she continued, spiritedly, "I am *proud* of him; I was proud to shake hands with him before the multitude, and I shall be proud to greet him as my friend when his term expires and he comes among us again."

"Very likely," Mr. Dalton answered sarcastically, his thin lips curling with scorn; "and after the very marked exhibition to-day, I should be prepared to know of your being 'proud' of him in almost any capacity. But pray, Editha, do not *gush* any more about it; it's all very well for a young lady to express her sympathy and proper feeling in a proper way and at a proper time; but it was exceedingly mortifying to me to-day to see you carry quite so much sail."

Miss Editha tossed her pretty head somewhat defiantly and impatiently at this curtain lecture, but a vivid scarlet burned upon her cheeks, showing that she felt its stinging force, notwithstanding.

Mr. Dalton continued, with increasing sarcasm:

"You and the young culprit formed the center of attraction during your tender little episode, and I doubt not, almost everybody thought you were taking a heart-broken leave of your lover, instead of a poor *protege*—a mere nobody—whom your philanthropic uncle had picked up."

Editha had started violently as Mr. Dalton spoke of Earle as her "*lover*," and the burning blood rushed in a flood to her brow, over her neck, arms, and hands, and tingled to the very tips of her toes.

Could it be possible that she had behaved in so unmaidenly a manner, and given the gaping multitude such an impression?

Earle Wayne her lover!

She had never had such a thought before; but a strange thrill shot through her heart now, bowing the defiant, sunny-haired head, and making the sweet blue eyes droop half guiltily.

But she quickly rallied, and, tossing back the waves of hair from her flushed face, she bravely returned to the combat.

"Well, and if he were—if—he were—what you have said of him, papa, I should *still* be proud of him, and—I'd be *true* to him, too. I'd *marry* him—*yes*, I *would*—just as soon as ever he got through with those hateful three years;" and she enforced her words with an emphatic tap of her small boot.

Mr. Dalton leaned back in the carriage and laughed heartily at this spirited outburst.

On the whole, he rather enjoyed seeing his charming daughter in a passion.

It was not often that he had the opportunity, for she was generally the happiest and gayest of maidens, and, being an only child, no cloud had ever been allowed to overshadow her.

But Mr. Dalton had been extremely annoyed at the scene in the court-room, deeming it vulgar in the extreme to be made so conspicuous before the rabble, and he had uttered words sharper than had ever been addressed to the petted child before during all her life.

But Editha was true and loyal to the core, and, when once she had made a friend, no adversity could turn her from that friend; and her whole nature had arisen to arms against the cruel injustice and wretched fate which had condemned one so noble and good as Earle to durance vile.

Her father's laugh capped the climax; the excitement, the pain in her heart, and, above all, his last insinuation, had been almost more than she could bear; but when his hearty laugh rang out so full of mocking amusement, she could endure no more, and, girl fashion, she burst into tears, believing herself the most deeply injured and abused maiden in existence.

"Come, come, pet, don't take it so much to heart; but in the future try and be a little less demonstrative," Mr. Dalton said, somewhat moved by her tears.

But Edith was deeply wounded; her tears must have their way now, and not another word was spoken during their drive.

Once at home, she darted into the house and up to her

own room, where, after she had wept her weep out alone, and something of the burden from her heart, she sat down to think.

Her cheeks burned hotly every time she recalled her father's light words.

"Earle Wayne my lover!" she murmured, with trembling lips, and burying her face in her hands, with a feeling of shame that she should dare to think of it, when Earle, doubtless, had never dreamed of such a thing himself.

Nevertheless, the words possessed a strange fascination for her.

When she knelt in prayer and spoke his name, claiming Heaven's tenderest care for the smitten one, the burning flush returned to her cheek, the thrill to her heart.

"Earle Wayne my lover!" she repeated, softly, as she laid her head upon her pillow, and her dreams were full of a manly face, with deep, dark eyes, in which shone a light tender and true, with lips that wore a smile as sweet and gentle as a woman's, but such as no woman's ever wore for her.

She still seemed to feel the clasp of his hand, the charm of his low spoken words, and the music of his voice and, when at length she awoke with the break of day, she was gay, careless Editha Dalton no longer.

A graver, quieter light looked out of her sunny eyes as she arose and dressed; lines of firmness and decision had settled about the smiling, happy mouth, and all the world had a deeper meaning for her than ever before.

"Standing, with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

It was as if she had suddenly turned a new page within her heart, and read thereon something which was to make her life in the future more beautiful and sacred, and yet which brought with the knowledge something of regret for the bright and careless days now gone forever.

She remembered that this was Earle's first day in prison—the first of those long, long three years—and the tears sprang to her eyes, a sob trembled on her lips.

It was only a few hours since she had seen him, but it seemed as if weeks had passed; and, if they had been so long to her, what must they have been to him?

Could he ever endure it? Could she ever wait with patience so long?

She could not go to him—he had said he could not bear to have her see him there—and so she had nothing to do but wait.

“But I will not forget him,” she murmured; “let papa say what he may, I have promised to be a friend to him, and I shall keep my promise. He has no one in all the world, or seems to have no one, save Uncle Richard and me. Every week I will send him something, just to let him know that there is one, at least, who cares a little and is sorry for him.”

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

A YEAR went by.

To Editha Dalton it seemed to fly as if with magic wings, for she was yet a school-girl, and this last year was filled with study and practice, and with all the bustle and excitement attendant upon preparing for graduating.

To Earle Wayne it passed in a slow, tedious, monotonous manner, with its changeless daily routine to and from the workshops and simple meals; its never-varying sights and sounds, bolts and bars. But notwithstanding he grew intensely wearied with all this, and oftentimes even heart-sick, yet his courage and his purpose never wavered. Every day was filled to the last moment with usefulness. Every day, when his task was completed, he drew forth his book and spent the remaining hours in study, storing his mind, increasing his knowledge of his chosen profession and preparing to carve out for himself a future which, in spite of his present misfortune, he fondly hoped would command the respect of all who knew or should ever know him.

He was cheerful and patient, performed his tasks with alacrity, and without the grumbling so usual among convicts; and, by his never-varying courtesy and good behavior, he won for himself the commendation of the officers, the good will of his companions, and, better than all, the days of grace allotted to those who are not reprimanded.

Every week on Saturday—the day on which any one may receive remembrances from their friends in the way of fruit, flowers, and other delicacies—there came to him some little token, that made his heart beat and thrill with pleasure.

Sometimes it was a simple bunch of rosebuds, which,

expanding day by day, blossomed at length into full glory, cheering and filling his gloomy cell with their beauty and fragrance.

Sometimes it was a box of lilies of the valley, or violets, or heliotrope and myrtle blossoms; at others, a tempting basket of fruit, with a book or periodical of some kind; and Earle knew that his little friend had not forgotten him;

Faithfully, never missing a single day, they came for a year, when they suddenly ceased, and he received them no more.

No one can realize how the poor prisoner missed these bright evidences of remembrance, nor how eagerly he still looked for them every Saturday for a long time, thinking that perhaps Editha was away or sick, and could not send them for him.

"She has forgotten me, after all," he sighed, sadly, after several months had passed and he had not received a single flower; and it seemed almost as if death had bereaved him of some dear one as he returned to his lonely cell at night, after his daily task was ended, and there was no sweet perfume to greet him, no bright blossoms to cheer him.

All that remained to comfort him was a little box filled with dried and faded flowers that he had not had the heart to throw away, and the memory of the brightness that had been.

And what was the reason of all this?

Had Editha forgotten?

Had she, amid the busy cares which occupied her time and attention at this time, grown careless and neglectful?

No. It happened in this way:

At the end of a year she graduated, doing honor to both her instructors and herself.

There was a day apart for public exercises, when the graduating class appeared before their many friends to show what they were capable of in the way of essays, poems, and other accomplishments, and to receive their diplomas.

Editha's poem was greeted with enthusiasm, a perfect storm of applause testifying to the appreciation of the public; whole floral offerings were showered at her feet, until there were enough to have stocked a florist in a small way.

Selecting the choicest of them all, she inclosed both bouquet and poem, together with a little explanatory note, in a box, and dispatched it to Earle.

Unfortunately, Mr. Dalton encountered the servant who was bearing this box to the express office, confiscated it,

and enjoined silence upon the bearer regarding its untimely fate. The poem he preserved, but the flowers were ruthlessly cast into the flames.

"We'll put a stop to all this nonsense," he muttered, as he watched their beauty blacken and shrivel upon the glowing coals; and from that day he took care that the lonely prisoner should receive no more flowers or tokens of remembrance from his little friend, who, though she never once failed to keep her promise, was yet destined, through the enmity of another, to appear unfaithful to her promises.

The second year passed, and it was a year fraught with events of pain and sorrow for our beautiful Editha.

Mrs. Dalton died—a woman of fashion and folly, but always kind, in her way, to Editha; and though there had never been as much of sympathy and harmony between them as there should be between mother and daughter, yet it left her very lonely, and occasioned her the deepest grief that the one whom she had always called by that sacred name should be taken from her.

Six months later Richard Forrester suddenly sickened, and from the first they knew that it was unto death.

This blow appeared likely to crush Editha, for "Uncle Richard" had always been her friend and sympathizer.

To him she had always carried all her griefs, her hopes and fears (for which no one else appeared to have neither time nor interest); and she ever found him a ready listener, and came away comforted and lightened of her burden, whatever it was.

If she wanted a particular favor, it was to Uncle Richard she applied. He gratified every childish whim or wish, no matter what it was or what expense, time, or trouble it involved.

He was her confidant, too; all her little school-girl secrets were whispered unreservedly in his ear, and, as she grew older, all her plans were submitted to his judgment rather than to that of either father or mother.

He always discussed them with her as with an equal, and as if they were as interesting to him as to herself, while her parents were liable to say, indulgently, yet with evident annoyance:

"Do as you like, child, but I am too busy to attend to anything of the kind."

From the moment of his attack, Mr. Forrester had insisted upon the presence of Editha at his bedside; and there he lay and watched her, with his heart in his eyes, as if he knew he was looking his last upon the fair face and sunny-

haired head that had been so dear to him for so many years.

He had been stricken with paralysis while pleading a case in the court-room, and was brought to his home never to leave it again until he was borne forth by other feet, and laid away from the sight of men forever.

His body was almost paralyzed, but, strange to say, his brain was clear, and he arranged regarding the disposal of many thing which were not mentioned in his will, and concerning the last services that were to be observed over his own body.

"My little girlie," he said, tenderly, to Editha one day, as she sat beside him, holding one of his numb and withered hands, and longing to do something to relieve his helplessness, "you have always loved Uncle Richard a little, haven't you?"

"A little!" she said, choking back a sob. "No one in all the world has ever been to me what you have been. You have been my confidant—my most intimate friend. I have never been able to go to papa, nor to poor mamma while she lived, and tell them my troubles as I have to you. I don't know why it was, but papa always laughed at and teased me, and mamma was too busy to attend to me. But you always put by everything and listened to me. Uncle Richard, I believe—I ought not to say it, perhaps, but I can just whisper it to *you* now—I believe I love you best of any one in all the world;" and Editha laid her cheek against his in a fond way that told how very dear he was to her.

"My dear child," the dying man said, with starting tears and trembling lip, "your words are very precious. I have been a very lonesome man for—for many years, but you have been a great comfort to me. Now, I want to talk very seriously to you for a little while. Do you think you can bear it?"

"Yes, but—but I am afraid it will not do for you to talk; the doctor said you must not have any excitement," Editha said knowing full well what subject was uppermost in his mind and shrinking from talking about it.

"It will not make any difference now, Edie, dear—a few hours or less will not matter to me——"

"Uncle Richard!" gasped the girl, as if she could not bear it.

"My dear, we both know that death must come to me soon," he said, gently, but with a sad smile; "the parting *must* come. If I do not get excited, I suppose I may live a few hours longer; but I have some things that must

be said, whether they excite me or not, and which I can say only to you; and, as I said before, a few hours will not matter. Do not weep thus, my darling; I cannot bear *that*," he added, as the golden head dropped upon his breast and Editha wept rebelliously.

"Uncle Richard, you are my only real friend; I cannot, *cannot* let you go. What shall I do without you?"

"Edie, dear, you must not give way thus—you must be brave and calm; it excites me more than anything else to see you grieve so," he said, huskily, as his lips pressed her shining hair, and his eyes were filled with tears.

She raised her head instantly and made an effort at self-control.

"Then I will not trouble you any more. Forgive me;" and her red lips sought his, so pale and drawn.

"That is right, dear do not let this, our last hour, perhaps, be wasted in tears and vain regrets. You know, Edie," he continued, after a few minutes' thought, "or, at least, I suppose you know, that I am considered to be very rich."

"Yes; but oh! if we could only give it all and have you well again," she mourned.

"Yes; gold is valueless when one comes to lie where I am to-day, and there is nothing a man would not give in exchange for his life; but that is something over which we can have no control, and so it is well at all times to be ready to go when we are called. But I want to tell you that several years ago I made a will, and made you my heiress; I have never had any one to love as I have loved you, and all that I accumulated was laid by for you. But now——"

He stopped, and a look of trouble and anxiety swept over his features.

"But what?" Editha asked; "have you any other wish now? I shall not care and everything shall be just as you would like it to be."

"Thank you, dear; and that is just the unselfish spirit that I like to see in you, and I know that you will make a good use of your fortune. But I *have* another wish; it is something that I intended doing myself, but have unwisely kept putting it off, and now I must leave it for you to carry out."

"Thank you for trusting me to do so, whatever it may be," Editha said, feeling deeply touched and grateful that he should deem her worthy to carry out any plan of his.

"From the first," he said, "I have been deeply interested in Earle——"

Editha started at the name, and the rosy tide swept over her fair face, while her eyes drooped half guiltily, as if she feared he suspected something of what her father had hinted so long ago regarding Earle.

The sick man observed it, and he regarded her keenly for a moment, then heaved a deep sigh.

"He came to me, you know, dear," he went on, "a poor, friendless boy of seventeen, and I, attracted by his honest face and engaging manner, gave him a place in my office. I was not long in discovering that I had found no ordinary character, and I resolved I would cultivate his talents, make a lawyer of him, and, when he should attain a proper age, make him an equal partner in my business. But you know the unfortunate circumstances which have blighted his career, and will mar it all his life——"

"No, Uncle Richard, I do not believe that," Editha interrupted, firmly. "I know well enough that Earle is innocent of any crime, and I believe he will rise above all his trouble."

"Yes, I, too, believe him innocent, and suffering a grievous wrong; but, unless his innocence is proven to the world, the disgrace of his imprisonment will cripple him all his life—the world will always sneer at and scorn him."

"I shall not, Uncle Richard; when he comes back to us, I shall be his friend just as I always have been, and I shall defend him wherever I go."

Richard Forrester's fading eyes lighted with admiration as they rested upon the spirited face beside him, and he listened to these brave and fearless words.

"I am proud of you, Editha, for standing up so bravely for the right, even though others may curl the lip at you for doing it. It is no wonder that I love you, dear," he added, with wistful tenderness; "if—if I only might have had—ah! what was I saying?"

He stopped suddenly, while a shudder shook him, and Editha, not understanding his last words, feared his mind was wandering.

Presently, however, he resumed:

"But what I wanted to tell you was this: Since Earle's misfortune I have planned to do something for him as soon as his time expires. He will be fitted for the bar by that time if he follows the course I have marked out for him, and I intended offering him a partnership with me; or, in case he did not feel like remaining here, giving him something handsome with which to start life somewhere else. But I can do neither now—I cannot even add a codicil to my will, as I would like to do, in his favor, I am so help-

less;" and he glanced down at his palsied hands with a heavy sigh.

"That is just like you, Uncle Richard; but he can have the money even if you are not able to change your will," Editha said, in a glad tone.

"Yes, that is what I want; when he comes out from that dismal place he will feel as if every man's hand is against him, and I want him to be independent until he can win his way and establish himself somewhere. I want you, Editha, to give him ten thousand dollars; I shall leave you a very handsome fortune, dear—more than a hundred and fifty thousand, and you will not miss that sum."

"No, indeed! Earle shall have twice that, if you would like. I do not need so much money, for I have papa to take care of *me*, you know."

Richard Forrester's lips curled slightly at her last words. No one knew better than he *how* Sumner Dalton had been able to provide as handsomely as he had for his family during the past years. But he said, positively:

"No, Editha, just ten thousand and no more; and, if he is the man I think he is, he will double it himself in a little while. Earle Wayne will make a noble man, but—there is some mystery connected with his early life."

"A mystery! Of what nature?"

"I do not know; he would not tell me, and that business of his that he went to transact on the day before the robbery, you remember, he said was connected with his past, and he would not reveal it; and that was one reason why the trial went against him."

"Yes, I remember; and I have often wondered what it could be," the young girl answered, thoughtfully.

"You are perfectly willing that he should have a portion of your fortune?" he asked, regarding her intently.

"Not only willing, but very *glad*, Uncle Richard," she replied, heartily.

He heaved a sigh of relief, as if that was a burden off his mind.

"He could not legally claim anything, even if he knew of my wish to give him this, because my will leaves you everything but you will settle upon him this amount as soon as his time is out?"

"Yes, I promise you that I will do *exactly* as you wish; and, Uncle Richard," she added, with a little smile, "you know that you have always taught me that I must keep my promises."

"That is right, and now there is one thing more. In the

private drawer of my safe there is a sealed package belonging to Earle, and which he committed to my care for the time of his imprisonment. This I also give into your hands to keep for him, and when you settle the money upon him you can return it to him; and *under no circumstances allow the seal to be broken.*"

"Certainly not. I accept this as a sacred trust, and I will be faithful to the letter."

"Thank you, dear; that is all, I believe; and now"—with a yearning look into the sweet, flushed face—"you will not forget 'Uncle Richard'—you will always think kindly of him?"

"As if I could ever think of you in any other way," Editha said, reproachfully, and with starting tears.

"My life has not been all smooth, darling. In my younger days there were things that happened which I could not help and yet—and yet"—with a shadow of pain on his brow—"perhaps I *might* have helped them in a degree if I had tried. But if—if you should ever hear anything that seems strange or wrong to you, you will try not to blame me—you will love me still?" he pleaded, yearningly.

"Uncle Richard, you cannot ever have done anything so very wrong. You must not talk so; if you do, I shall not be able to listen to you calmly. I shall break down in spite of myself, and I must not for your sake," Editha said, brokenly, and feeling as if her heart must burst with its weight of sorrow.

"Well, well, dear, I will say no more, and it is pleasant to know you trust me so. You cannot know *how* much I have always loved you. You have been like a little green oasis in the desert of my heart; always a source of comfort and joy to me. I hope, my darling, that nothing will ever cloud your future; but if there should, you will still love and think of me kindly—you will not blame Uncle Richard for anything?" he still persisted, as if some great and sudden fear had overtaken him at the last moment.

"No—no, indeed. I cannot bear it. How strangely you talk!" the fair girl said, deeply distressed by his words, and fearing that death was taking the strength and vigor of his mind.

"I know—I know; I ought not to trouble you thus; but"—with a deep-drawn sigh—"there are so many sad things in life. God bless you, my darling—my *own* darling—God ever bless and keep you from all sorrow and harm."

He lay silent for several minutes, looking up into her face, as if he knew it was the last time, and he must fix

its every lineament upon his memory before the great unknown wrapped him in its mystic folds.

At length he whispered:

"Now kiss me, dear, and go out into the fresh air. I have kept you too long; your cheeks are pale, your eyes are dim. I fear I have been selfish to keep you here so much."

Editha stopped with a sob and kissed him upon his lips, his cheek, his eyes, his hair, with passionate fervor, and then went away, glad to be alone for a little while, that she might give vent unrestrained to her nearly breaking heart.

The sick man watched her with fond and longing eyes, as she glided from the room, and then murmured, prayerfully: "Heaven grant that *that sin* may never shadow *her* life. Farewell, my sweet Editha—the only gleam of real happiness my life has ever known."

When early morning came, dim and quiet, and chill with the heavy dew, the palsied limbs had grown cold and stiff; the great heart had ceased its sluggish beating; the sightless eyes were closed; the noble face had settled into peace, and the soul had passed through death's portal and waked in Paradise.

Yes, Richard Forrester was dead; and thus his life flowed out from its mysterious urn into the great unknown.

CHAPTER V

"I SHALL KEEP MY PLEDGE"

RICHARD FORRESTER'S affairs were duly settled, and his property—an exceedingly handsome property, too—passed into the hands of Editha Dalton.

The young girl had grown wonderfully womanly and dignified during the last two years.

She was not like the careless, sparkling, impulsive Editha who had so dauntlessly stood up in the crowded court-room and defended the hero of our story on that sad day when he received a felon's doom.

She was more grave and self-contained, more thoughtful and dignified, but not a whit less sweet and attractive.

If anything, the gentle gravity of the deep blue eyes, with their steady, searching glance, possessed a greater charm than when they had been so full of mirth and laughter; the calm, self-possessed manner was more fascinating than the careless gayety of the light-hearted school-girl.

She persisted—much to her father's inward vexation and disgust, for he had fondly hoped to have the handling of her money matters—in going over all her uncle's papers, and becoming thoroughly acquainted with all the points of business pertaining to them.

He had said he felt sure she would make good use of the fortune which he had left her, and she knew that, in order to do so, she must understand in the beginning everything concerning it.

So she listened with the strictest attention while the prosy lawyer whom Richard Forrester had appointed to settle his affairs explained, now and then putting an intelligent question, which showed that her mind was strong and clear to grasp every detail.

She would allow no one save herself to examine the private drawer of Richard Forrester's safe, although Mr. Dalton stood by chafing at her obstinacy, and longing to see for himself what it contained.

She found, as she expected, the package belonging to Earle, of which her uncle had spoken.

"What have you there, Editha?" her father asked, as, after examining its address and seal, she was about to return it to the drawer.

"It is something—some papers, I think, that belonged to Earle," Editha answered, and he noticed the flush that sprang to her cheek as she pronounced his name.

"Let me see it," he said, holding out his hand for it.

"You can examine the outside, papa, if you like; but the package is not to be opened," she said, as she reluctantly handed it to him.

"Indeed! and by whose authority do you speak so emphatically?" Mr. Dalton demanded, with a sneer, as he curiously examined the bold, clear writing upon the wrapper, and wondered what secrets it contained.

"By Uncle Richard's, papa," Editha replied, firmly, the flush growing deeper on her cheek at his sneer.

He spoke oftener now to her in that way than he had ever done before, and not a day passed that he did not wound her deeply, and make her feel as if her only remaining friend was becoming alienated from her.

Mr. Dalton, on his part, was very much chagrined that she should presume to act so independently.

It was a great disappointment to him that he could not control her large income, which he had intended should contribute as much to his own enjoyment as to hers.

Money was his god; not to hoard and keep, but for the

pleasure he could get from it; and *he* knew how to live for *that* end as well as any one in the world.

But Editha, after acquainting herself thoroughly with the details of her position as her uncle's heiress, had again committed everything into the hands of Mr. Forrester's lawyer, Mr. Felton saying he was to manage for her just as he had done for him, and it was better he should do so, since he understood everything, than to make any change.

"By your Uncle Richard's, eh?" repeated Mr. Dalton, as he still regarded the package belonging to Earle Wayne.

"Yes, sir; the last day of his life he gave me some directions, and among other things committed these papers to my keeping until Earle's time should expire, and charged me *under no circumstances to allow the seal to be broken.*"

"Pshaw! what a fuss over a little mess of papers; and what can it matter to any one if we look inside? It is sealed with a regular seal, too. I have considerable curiosity to know what silly secret the young convict regards so sacredly."

"I do not think it is very kind, sir, to speak of Earle in that way; and, whether it is silly or not, it *is* his secret, and no one has any right to it but himself," Editha answered with dignity and some show of spirit.

"It seems to me you are unaccountably interested, and very valiant in your defense of a convicted criminal," retorted Mr. Dalton, considerably irritated by his daughter's independence.

"I am deeply interested in Earle Wayne, papa; he was my friend before he was so unfortunate; he is my friend still," she bravely returned.

"I suppose you even intend to take him under the shadow of your sheltering wing when he comes out of prison?" he sneered.

"I shall certainly not withhold my friendship from him while he is in every way worthy to retain it; and besides——"

"Besides what?" Sumner Dalton asked, with blazing eyes, as she hesitated.

He had no idea that there was so much fire and spirit bottled up in the little lady, who until quite recently had appeared to him only a light-hearted, sweet-tempered child.

True, she had been willful at times, but he had not minded it when it was confined to the little things of childhood, and never having had any other children, it had been a pleasure to pet her and indulge her in everything.

He had hitherto always laughed when she opposed him,

and often teased her for the sake of arousing her antagonism, which made her appear so pretty and brilliant.

Now, however, it was another matter.

She was setting up her will in stubborn opposition to his, and upon matters of vital importance to him, too.

He had no notion of allowing her to compromise herself by befriending a miserable criminal, and he was bound to put a stop to it in some way.

"Besides what?" he repeated, as she did not immediately reply.

She looked at him askance, as if she was somewhat doubtful of the propriety of telling him anything more.

But at length she said:

"You know that Uncle Richard was also deeply interested in, and entertained a high regard for Earle——"

"Please adopt a different way of speaking of him; I do not like you to use his name so familiarly," interrupted Mr. Dalton, with an angry tap of his foot.

"Very well; for Mr. Wayne, then," she said, flushing; "and, during my last interview with him, he said he regarded him as a young man of great ability and promise, and that he had intended, as soon as he was fitted for the bar, to make him a partner in his business. All this he was going to do for one whom *you* appear to hold in such contempt, and as soon as his time should expire, if he would accept it."

"I do believe that Richard Forrester was born with a soft spot somewhere, after all," began her father, impatiently.

"Yes, sir, and it was *in his heart*," Edith interrupted, quietly, but with an ominous sparkle in her blue eyes.

She could not tamely listen even to her father if anything disparaging was said of her beloved Uncle Richard.

Mr. Dalton glanced at her as if resenting the interruption, and then continued:

"He was keen enough in business and in making money, but he has shown himself almost an imbecile about some other things during the forty years that he had lived.

"Papa, do you forget that you are speaking of the dead?" Edith asked, in a low, constrained tone.

"No; but I have no patience with such foolishness as he has more than once been guilty of," was the impatient reply.

"What has Uncle Richard done that is so very foolish? He told me on that last day that his life had not been all smooth. What has he done?" Edith asked, with evident anxiety.

"No matter—no matter," Mr. Dalton said, hastily; then,

as if anxious to change the subject, asked: "Is that all you were going to tell me?"

"No; but I'm afraid you will be even more displeased with the rest of it than with what I have already told you," the young girl said, doubtfully.

"At all events, let me hear it."

"He said if he had not been so helpless he would have added a codicil to his will, and given Ear—Mr. Wayne something handsome to start in life with, when his three years should expire——"

"Aha!"

"And he made me promise that I would settle ten thousand dollars upon him just as soon as he should be free, and at the same time return his package to him."

"Ten thousand dollars!" exclaimed Sumner Dalton aghast.

"Yes, sir. "

"I don't believe it, Editha Dalton. It is more like a sickly, sentimental fancy of your own," was the excited retort. Mr. Dalton was furious at the thought. Ten thousand dollars of Editha's fortune to be given away to a beggar and a criminal!

"Papa!"

"I do not believe it, I say! Such a monstrous proceeding could never have originated in the brain of a sane man."

"Papa, was I ever guilty of telling you a falsehood?" the young girl demanded, turning upon him, all the pride of her nature aroused by his words.

"Not that I know of; but——"

"Then do not dare to accuse me of it now. I am telling you only truth, and the wishes of a dying man. Uncle Richard's wishes in this respect are sacred to me, even if my own heart and my friendship for Mr. Wayne did not prompt me to do him this little kindness out of my abundance."

"Little kindness! It would not take very many such *little kindnesses* to make a beggar of yourself," sneered Mr. Dalton, wrathfully.

"I pledged myself to execute this wish just as soon as Earle's time expires, and I shall fulfill my pledge to the letter," Editha returned, somewhat proudly.

"Not if I know it, Miss Dalton. Such folly—such rashness, I could never allow you to be guilty of."

"Papa," she began, pleadingly, her face full of pain, her eyes full of tears, "why are you so changed toward me lately? You and I are all that are left of our family. We

have no near relatives; we are almost alone in the world. Do not, *please* do not, let there be any estrangement, any disagreement between us."

Mr. Dalton's face softened for the moment.

"Certainly not, my dear," he replied, adopting his usual fond tone and manner, "there need be no estrangement, no disagreement, if you will be reasonable; but, of course, I cannot allow you to squander your money in the way you propose doing."

"My money! How came it mine? Whose was it before it became mine?"

"Richard Forrester's, of course," he said, with some uneasiness.

"Yes; and before it became mine he reserved this ten thousand to be given to Earle. Surely he had a right to do with his own as he would."

"Very true; but you forget—his will was made years ago, giving you *everything*."

"He did not know Earle then; but he *said* if he could only have the use of his hands, he would have added a codicil to his will in his favor."

"But he did *not* do it. The will stands just as it always has, and he can claim nothing. No part of your fortune is *legally* his."

"He told me it was his *wish*, and I shall give Earle the money," Editha answered, firmly.

"You will *not*," asserted Mr. Dalton, positively.

"Papa, do you know how much I am worth in all?"

"A hundred and seventy-five thousand strong—a handsome fortune, a *very* handsome fortune for a young girl like you to possess," he said, rubbing his hands together with an air of satisfaction, as if he expected to reap no little benefit from the said fortune himself.

"That is more than Uncle Richard thought, owing, no doubt, to the successful sale of that block I did not wish to keep and Mr. Felton advised me to sell. Uncle Richard told me there would be more than a hundred and fifty thousand; but you see I have nearly twenty-five thousand more than he expected; and, even after giving Earle what he wished, I shall have more than he thought."

"What nonsense, child!"

"It is not nonsense. The money was set apart for him, and I should be a thief and a robber not to do with it as I was bidden. I have promised, and I shall fulfill," Editha returned, steadfastly.

"Not with *my* consent, miss," Mr. Dalton cried, hotly.

"Then it will have to be done without it," she answered, sadly.

"That cannot be; you are under age; you are only nineteen, and it will be more than a year before you are free to act upon your own authority. Meantime, I am your legal guardian, and you can transfer no property without my consent," her father replied, triumphantly.

"Is that so?" Editha asked, with a startled look.

"That is so, according to the law of this State."

"Papa, you cannot mean what you say. You *must* allow me to do this thing; you would not be so dishonorable as to withhold this money from Earle when it is really his. He has only about nine months longer to stay——"

"A year, you mean," Mr. Dalton interrupted.

"No; his 'days of grace' amount to three months, and so he will be free in about nine; and he will be absolutely penniless—he will have nothing upon which to begin life. It would be cruel to keep this money from him when it is rightfully his, and he will need it so much. Pray, papa, be kind and reasonable, and let me do as Uncle Richard wished," pleaded the fair girl, earnestly.

"Richard Forrester didn't know what he wished himself, or he would never have been guilty of such folly."

"Papa, you *know* that his mind was as clear as either yours or mine is at this moment," Editha exclaimed, nearly ready to weep at this cruel opposition.

"It does not matter; I shall never consent to your fooling away ten thousand dollars in any such manner; so let this end the controversy at once," he returned, doggedly.

"Poor Earle!" sighed Editha, regretfully; "then he'll have to wait a whole year for it. It is too bad."

"Wait a *year* for it—what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Dalton sharply.

"I mean, papa, that if I cannot give it to him without your consent, that he will have to wait for it until I am twenty-one. But the very day that I attain my majority I shall go to Mr. Felton and have him make over ten thousand dollars to Earle Wayne," and the gentle blue eyes met his with a look that told him she would do just as she had said.

"Do you defy me, then? You will not dare!" he cried, actually quivering with anger at her words.

"I have promised, and—I *shall keep my pledge*."

Editha had grown very pale, but she spoke very firmly and steadily.

Sumner Dalton shot a dark look at the defiant little figure

standing so quietly opposite him, and muttered an oath under his breath.

Then, apparently thinking it unwise to say more upon the subject just then, he turned his attention again to the package which he still held in his hands.

Editha's eyes followed his, and she held out her hand, saying:

"I will replace that in the safe now, if you please."

"I wonder what there is in it?" he said, curiously.

Her lip curled a little, but she made no reply, still standing with outstretched hand, waiting for him to give it to her.

"I've half a mind to open it," he muttered.

"No, *indeed!*" she cried, in alarm, and taking a step forward.

"Pshaw! it can do no harm—it cannot contain anything so *very* remarkable."

"Sir, pray do not allow me to lose *all* the respect I have for my own father," Editha cried, sternly, her eyes ablaze, her face flushing a painful crimson, her form dilating with surprise, indignation, and grief.

A peculiar, mocking laugh was all the reply he made to this, but he handed back the package; not, however, without inwardly resolving to ascertain, before very long, what it contained.

Editha hastily returned it to the private drawer, locked it and the safe securely, and then, without a word, left the room.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT WAS IT?

SUMNER DALTON was a supremely selfish man.

From his earliest boyhood his chief aim had been to get gold, no matter how, that he might fill his life to the brim with pleasure, and his highest ambition was to walk among the proudest of the land, and mingle in their enjoyments as an equal.

Naught but a golden key would unlock the door leading into these charmed regions, therefore gold became his idol. When everything went smoothly, he was easy and tolerably good-natured; but when opposed or disappointed by any one in his plans or schemes, it was anything but pleasant for

those about him, and he did not allow an opportunity to pass to revenge himself of the offense.

He did not believe in grieving his life away for the dead; people must die and be buried; the world was made for the enjoyment of the living, and it was his maxim to improve those pleasures to the utmost while he lived.

His wife died the last of October, Richard Forrester the following April; and in June, when the hot weather came on, he told Editha to prepare for the season at Newport as he intended spending the summer there as usual, with, perhaps, a trip to Saratoga and Long Branch, by way of variety.

Editha, with her heart saddened from her recent bereavement, would have much preferred remaining quietly at home; feeling, too, that there was more of comfort there in its large, airy, and beautiful rooms than in a crowded, fashionable hotel, where, at the most, she could have but two or three apartments, and those comparatively small and close.

Then she had no heart for the glitter and confusion of society; those two dead faces, so cold and fixed, were too fresh in her memory for her to take any pleasure in the gayeties of the world.

She ventured a protest when Mr. Dalton spoke of his intentions, but he peremptorily silenced her by asking her if she supposed she was going to have everything her own way since she had go to be an heiress.

He had treated her very coolly, and they had seemed to be growing farther and farther apart ever since that spirited interview regarding Richard Forrester's bequest to Earle Wayne.

Edith was deeply hurt that he should consider her so selfish and willful, and finally said she would go to Newport if he wished.

"I do wish it; and, Editha, I want you to leave all that somber black trumpery at home, and put on something gay and pretty," he added, with a disappointing glance at her mourning robes.

"Papa! surely you do not mean me to take off my mourning!" she exclaimed, in blank astonishment.

"Yes, I do; there can be no possible good in wearing such gloomy-looking things; they are perfectly hateful."

"But mamma has only been gone about nine months, and Uncle Richard not quite three, and——"

A quick rush of tears into the sad blue eyes and a great choking lump in her throat suddenly stopped her.

"Your mother would not wish to see you in such dismal garments; she could never endure black anyway; and your Uncle Richard would much prefer to see you looking bright and cheerful," replied Mr. Dalton.

Editha knew this was true, but it seemed almost like treason to her beloved ones to lay aside all evidence of her sorrow and go back to the gay habiliments of the world. But she submitted to this *edict of Dalton* also for the sake of peace; and though she could not bring her mind to assume gay colors, yet she bought charming suits of finest white cambric and lawn, and muslins delicately sprigged with lavender, with richer and more elegant damasse, silk and lace, all white, for evening wear.

It was an exceedingly simple wardrobe, yet rich and charming withal, and even her fastidious father could find no fault when he saw her arrayed in it.

The night before they were to leave, at midnight, Sumner Dalton might have been seen creeping steadily downstairs and into Editha's private library.

It was a room that had once been her mother's morning sitting-room, and where she had had all her uncle's books, pictures, and safe removed after his death, and here she spent much of her time, reading the books he had loved, sewing a little, painting a little, and thinking a great deal of the friend who had been so very dear to her.

Mr. Dalton acted as if he felt very much like an intruder or a thief as he glided noiselessly into this room, closing and locking the door after him.

He went directly to the safe; taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he selected one and proceeded to unlock it.

"Did the foolish little chit think to keep her secrets from me?" he sneered, as he easily turned the lock and the door swung noiselessly back. "She'll find she will be obliged to use more stratagem than she possesses in her small head before she can outwit an old one like mine," he continued, as he proceeded to search every drawer the safe contained.

None was locked save the private drawer in which he had seen Editha place Earle's package, and he found nothing of any interest in any of them.

Selecting another key from his bunch, he quickly opened the private drawer, and a grunt of satisfaction immediately escaped him, showing that now he had found what he wanted.

He took it out, and the light revealed the package which Editha had sought to treasure so sacredly.

"There was always something mysterious about that proud

scamp," he muttered, eyeing the package curiously; "and now, if there is anything here to tell me who and what he is, I'm going to know it. He said his business *that night*," he continued, reflectively, "concerned only his own private interests, and was connected with his early life; perhaps I shall learn something more about those 'private interests' and 'early life.'"

He removed the light from the floor (where he had put it to see to unlock the safe, to the table, seated himself comfortably in a revolving chair, took out a handsome pocket-knife, and, in the most careful and delicate manner imaginable, removed entire the heavy seal of wax from the package.

Putting this in a place of safety that no harm might come to it, he removed the wrapping of heavy paper and began to inspect the contents.

They consisted chiefly of letters addressed to Earle, in a delicate, feminine hand, the sight of which made Sumner Dalton start violently and grow a sudden crimson.

"Pshaw!" he said, impatiently, and drawing a deep breath, "there are hundreds of women who write a similar hand."

He opened one or two of the letters and read them.

They were all dated from a little town in England, and were addressed to "My dear son," and simply signed "Your loving mother."

There was not much of interest in them to him, only now and then there was an expression which seemed to touch some long dormant chord of memory, and made him shiver as he read.

He soon grew weary of this occupation, however, and laid the letters aside to examine further.

There were several pretty drawings wrapped in tissue paper, a sketch, in water-colors, of a charming little cottage, half hidden by vines and climbing roses, and in one corner of this there were three tiny initials.

Sumner Dalton nearly bounded from his chair as he read them, repeating them aloud as he did so.

The color forsook his face, his lips twitched nervously, and a startled, anxious expression sprang to his eyes.

He hastily thrust the drawing one side and went on now more eagerly with his quest.

The only remaining things in the package were a large envelope, containing a few photographs, and a very heavy piece of parchment—more like cardboard—about five inches

wide and eight long, and upon which there was some writing in cipher that he could not read.

It seemed to be there more as a foundation to build the package than anything else, and Mr. Dalton, attaching no importance whatever to it, pushed it one side and turned his attention to the pictures.

One by one he took them up and looked at them, but there was no familiar face, and they were mostly pictures of young boys and girls, evidently schoolmates of Earle's.

At last he came to what seemed to be one carefully inclosed in a separate envelope.

He opened this, and found that its contents were wrapped about with tissue paper.

"Some pretty girl who has captivated his boyish fancy. Who knows but it may be a picture of Editha herself?" he muttered, with a scornful smile.

He removed the wrapper, and two pictures dropped upon the table, and also a lock of auburn hair, tied with a blue ribbon.

He took up one of the pictures with a yawn.

Surely this was not worth the loss of so much sleep and the treachery he had employed to gain his object.

But—what is this?

Something that makes the blood rush back upon his heart with suffocating force, his eyes to start with horror, and a clammy moisture to ooze from every pore.

It is the face of a beautiful woman of perhaps thirty-five years.

Dark, abundant hair crowned the small, shapely head set most gracefully upon a pair of sloping shoulders.

Grave, sad eyes looked up at the horror-stricken face with an expression which strangely moved the strong man.

A straight, delicate nose and a mouth sweet and gentle in expression, but deeply lined with suffering, completed the picture. Underneath, and traced in the same delicate chirography which the letters bore, were the words:

"Mother, to her dear boy."

With trembling hands Sumner Dalton laid it down and took up the other picture, and gazed as if fascinated upon it. It was the same face, only evidently taken fifteen or twenty years previous.

It was a magic face, one of bewildering, entrancing beauty, and full of mirth and careless glee.

Rippling curls that caught the sunlight with every breath; dancing eyes of loveliest expression; the same straight, delicate nose as seen in the other likeness, and a sweet mouth,

whose bright and careless smile told of not a care in all the world. This was the picture that held Sumner Dalton spell-bound with a strange horror.

Underneath, in the same delicate hand, were the three tiny initials that he had seen upon the sketch in watercolors.

The strong man groaned aloud as he looked; the photograph dropped from his nervous fingers, and he shook like one with the ague. He wiped the sweat from his brow; he rubbed his eyes as if to clear his vision, and looked again, comparing the two faces.

But only to groan again more bitterly than before.

There could be no doubt that both pictures were of the same person, only taken at different times; one during happy girlhood days, the other at a maturer age, and to gratify the wishes of her son.

"*Earle Wayne her son!* Earle Wayne, the prisoner, the—criminal! Great heaven!" he cried, with ashen lips, and in tones expressive of intense horror and fear.

Then, with a round oath, he threw both pictures from him as if they burned him, and, leaping to his feet, began pacing excitedly back and forth upon the floor.

"What shade of evil has sent this thing to confront me at this late hour of my life?" he cried, with exceeding bitterness. "Did I not have enough of disappointment and regret to bear at *that* time without being reminded of it in this way now? I was cheated, foiled out of what I would almost have given half a life-time to have attained. Oh! if I had only known—*why* was there no one to tell me? *Why*——"

He stopped in the midst of his walk, and clenched his hands and ground his teeth in fiercest wrath.

"I was a fool!—an idiot! I hate myself, I hate her—I hate all the world, who *knew* and did not tell me. And *he* is *her* son, *he* is——

"Ah! I have never loved him any *too* well—I love him far less now, for—*he is a living monument of my defeat*. No wonder he is proud; no wonder he bore his trial with such fortitude, if he possesses a tithe of the spirit and resolution that *she* possessed and displayed more than twenty years ago. I wish he had five times three years to serve; but I'll crush him when he comes out, as I would like to crush every one who knew at *that time*, and d'd not tell me. He may go to the ——. It is nothing to me if he *is* innocent, and yet a prisoner. It shall not disturb me, and I will not have my enjoyment destroyed by this grim phantom of the past. I'll cast care and worry to the winds, be merry, and

go my own way; but—let *him* look out that he does not cross *my* path again,” he concluded, with a fierceness that was terrible to observe.

He lifted his head defiantly as he uttered those words, but continued pacing back and forth for another half-hour, muttering constantly, but indistinctly, to himself.

“Ugh! but it gives me a sickly feeling in spite of myself,” he said at length, as he went back to the table and began to gather up the papers scattered there.

He folded the pictures in their wrappers as he had found them, putting the auburn lock of hair between them, though the touch of it sent the cold chills down his back and another fierce oath to his lips.

He gazed curiously again at the piece of parchment with the peculiar writing upon it, and wondered if it contained any meaning of importance but he at last arranged everything just as he had found it, folding the outside wrapper carefully over all.

He then melted a little wax from Editha's stand, and dropped upon it to fasten it, after which he carefully pressed the original seal into its proper place.

It was all very neatly and nicely done, and no one save an expert would ever have imagined that the package had been tampered with at all.

He replaced it just as he had found it in the private drawer of the safe, locked it, closed and locked the safe, and then stole noiselessly away to his own chamber, and to bed.

But no sleep came to him that night, “to weigh his eyelids down, or steep his senses in forgetfulness.” Visions of the past seemed to haunt him with a vividness which appeared to arouse every evil passion in his nature.

He tossed incessantly on his pillow, and groaned, and raged, and swore, first at himself and then at all the world, for some wrong, real or imaginary, which he had suffered during the earlier years of his life.

Some secret he evidently had on his mind, which filled him first with remorse and then with anger; and so the night wore out and morning broke, and found him haggard, hollow-eyed, and exhausted from the storm of fury which had raged so long in his soul.

What was it?

What was this strange secret connected with his previous history with Earle Wayne, and with the beautiful woman whose pictures he had found in the package which had been given into Richard Forrester's hands for safe keeping?

CHAPTER VII

EDITHA'S RESOLUTION

EVERYBODY who knows anything about Newport—the Brighton of America—knows that the season there is one long scene of gayety, pleasure, and splendor.

And this year bade fair to eclipse all previous years owing to the unusual brilliancy and elegance of its entertainments, its incessant round of pleasure, the presence of numberless beautiful women, with their magnificent toilets, and the great number of distinguished guests from abroad.

Among these latter one in particular seemed to attract great attention, on account of his noble personal attractions, the report of his great wealth, and, more than all, because of his being unmarried, handsome, and—thirty.

He was an F. R. C. S., had graduated with high honors, and the reputation of his skill was in everybody's mouth, while it was stated upon the best authority that he was heir prospective to large estates in both England and France, though where they were situated, and of their extent, no one seemed to know.

"Mr. Tressalia, allow me to present to you my daughter, Miss Dalton."

Such was the introduction of Paul Tressalia, the distinguished stranger, to Edith Dalton, as performed by Mr. Dalton, one golden summer evening, as Editha sat by herself upon the broad piazza of their hotel, musing rather pensively upon the events of the past two years.

Editha lifted her large blue eyes, which filled with instant admiration as they rested upon the handsome stranger, and she gracefully saluted him, realizing at once that she was in the presence of a man of power—one of superior intellect, and yet with a velvet hand withal, as the mild dark eyes and the gentle expression of his mouth asserted.

Mr. Tressalia, on his part, was evidently powerfully attracted by those same large and expressive eyes, which were reading his face with such a comprehensive glance.

His gaze rested admiringly on the slender figure, with its mien of blended grace, reserve, and dignity, attired, so simply yet artistically, in its force of spotless embroidered muslin; on the small head, with its silken aureate crown; on the sweet face, so full of expression and the impress of latent character.

Her small hands seemed to him like "symmetrical snow-

flakes," her feet like little mice peeping from beneath the flowing robe, and all her movements full of "sweet, attractive grace."

Mr. Tressalia noted all this during the ceremony of introduction, and realized at once that he had "met his fate" in this being "fair as Venus," whose

"Face and figure wove a spell
While her bright eyes were beaming."

Editha had not mingled very much in the gayeties of Newport as yet—she could not enjoy them; her heart was sore and sad; she could not forget the two dear ones so recently gone, nor the young promising life confined by prison walls.

Not a day passed that Earle Wayne's noble face did not rise up before her, and she seemed to hear his rich, clear voice asserting constantly, "Their *saying* that I am guilty does not *make* me so. I have the consciousness within me that I am innocent of a crime, and I will live to prove it yet to *you* and the world," and the knowledge of his cruel fate was a constant pain. But now she was almost insensibly drawn out of herself and her sad musings.

Mr. Tressalia possessed a peculiar charm in his gentle manner, and in his brilliant and intelligent conversation; and, almost before she was aware of it, Editha found herself joining and enjoying the party of choice spirits who seemed to own him as their center.

The ice once broken, who shall tell of the bright, delightful days that followed?

And yet in the midst of all this she did not forget Earle; every morning on rising, and at evening on retiring, her thoughts fled to that gloomy cell, with its innocent inmate suffering for another's crime.

Every week she faithfully dispatched her floral remembrance; but Mr. Dalton's servant having received permanent instructions upon that subject, they never left the hotel, and were ruthlessly destroyed and their beauty lost.

People were not long in discovering that the beautiful heiress, Miss Dalton, was the charm that bound the distinguished Mr. Tressalia to Newport, and the desirableness and suitableness of an alliance between them began to be freely discussed and commented upon; while, as if by common consent, all other suitors dropped out of the field, as if convinced of the hopelessness of their cause, and she thereby fell to the charge of the young Englishman upon all occasions.

But Editha began to feel somewhat uneasy at the way matters were settling themselves.

She liked her new friend extremely; he was a man that could fail to command everywhere respect and admiration, and she could not help enjoying his cultivated society; but she did not enjoy being paired off with him, to the exclusion of everybody else, upon every occasion; for her woman's instinct told her whither all this was tending, and she knew it ought not to be.

Mr. Dalton, however, was exceedingly elated over the prospect, and took no pains to conceal his satisfaction, nor to contradict the gossip regarding an approaching engagement, while, at the same time, he was never weary of recounting Mr. Tressalia's merits to his daughter.

When at length Editha began to excuse herself from accompanying him upon excursions of pleasure, and to retire to her own rooms upon some slight pretext when he joined them at evening on the piazza, her father became highly incensed, and fumed and fretted himself almost into a fever on account of it.

"Editha, you will oblige me by not being quite so indifferent to Mr. Tressalia's attentions," Mr. Dalton said one day, upon their return from a brilliant reception given on board a French man-of-war lying at anchor in the harbor.

The commander was a friend of Mr. Tressalia's, and had given an elaborate breakfast and reception to him and his friends, together with some distinguished people sojourning at Newport.

Editha and Mr. Dalton had been among the guests, and the former had been perfectly charming, in her dainty lawn, embroidered with rich purple pansies, and her jaunty hat, surrounded with a wreath of the same flowers.

She had attracted marked attention from commander and officers, and also from many of the guests, and in this way had succeeded in saving herself from the usual "pairing off."

She had been somewhat reserved, too, in her manner toward Mr. Tressalia, and her father swore more than once to himself at her evident avoidance of him.

She blushed at his remark, but said, very quietly:

"I am not aware that I treat Mr. Tressalia indifferently, papa. He is a very pleasant gentleman, and I enjoy his society exceedingly."

"Then why did you avoid him so persistently to-day?" he demanded.

"I would not appear to avoid any of our friends," Editha

said, with a deepening flush; "but really I do not enjoy being monopolized by one person so entirely as I have been the past two or three weeks."

"What particular objection have you to Mr. Tressalia?"

"None whatever. I repeat, he is a very cultivated and agreeable gentleman, and I enjoy his society."

"Then I desire that you may show a little more pleasure in it," Mr. Dalton returned, impatiently.

"In what way, papa? *How* shall I *show* my pleasure in Mr. Tressalia's society?" Editha asked, looking up at him with a droll expression of innocence.

Mr. Dalton flushed hotly himself now. It was not an easy question to answer, for, of course, he could not say that he would like her to become unmaidenly conspicuous in her pleasure, and it was rather a difficult and perplexing matter to make a *rule* for her to follow, and one, too, that would bring about the end he so much desired.

"What a question, Editha!" he exclaimed, after a moment's thought; "when you are pleased with *anything*, it is not difficult to show it, is it?"

"Oh, no; but then there are different degrees of pleasure, you know; and, from the way you spoke, I thought perhaps you desired me to adopt the *superlative*, and that, I fear, would be 'mortifying' to you," she said, with a sparkle of mischief in her tones.

She was laughing at him now, and Mr. Dalton did not find himself in a very agreeable position.

He remembered that he had once chided her very severely for being so demonstrative, and cautioned her not to "*gush*," saying it was all "very well for a young lady to express her feelings in a proper way, and at a proper time, but it was *mortifying* to him to have her carry quite so much sail."

Editha doubtless remembered it also, and referred to this very lecture, judging from her words and manner, and for a moment he hardly knew what reply to make.

"I think your sarcasm is a little ill-timed," he at length said, stiffly. "Mr. Tressalia has hitherto paid you marked attention, and you have not demurred; but your avoidance of him to-day could not fail to occasion him surprise and pain, and also remark on the part of others. As for your being monopolized by one person, as you express it, there are very few young ladies in Newport who would not be very glad to be chosen from among the many by a man like Paul Tressalia."

"It is not Mr. Tressalia that I object to at all; it is the idea of always being paired off with him, as if no other

gentleman had any right to approach me," Editha said, with heightening color.

"You object to him, then, as a permanent escort?"

"Yes, sir, I do," she answered, decidedly.

"And why, if I may ask?"

"Because I do not wish to accept attentions which might lead Mr. Tressalia to imagine that I possess a deeper regard for him than I really have," Editha said, candidly, yet with some confusion.

"Then you mean me to understand you regard Paul Tressalia only in the light of a friend, and you are unwilling that freindship should develop into any warmer sentiment?" Mr. Dalton asked, with lowering brow.

"Yes, sir," was the firm though low reply.

"That places me in a very fine position; for—for—I may as well out with it first as last—that gentleman has asked my permission to address you with a view to marriage, and I have given it;" and Mr. Dalton looked very much disturbed and angry.

"Oh, papa!" Editha exclaimed, in pained surprise, and flushing deepest crimson.

"Well?" he demanded, almost fiercely, while he eyed her keenly.

"I am very sorry you have done so, for it cannot be;" and her voice trembled slightly as she said it.

"Why?"

"Because—I can never care for him in any such way as *that*."

"In any such way as what?" he asked, with a sneer.

"You know what I mean well enough—the warmer sentiment of which I have already spoken," she answered, with a rush of tears to her eyes at his unkind tone. She struggled a moment for self-control, and then continued:

"I admire Mr. Tressalia exceedingly; he is a man who must command any woman's respect and esteem; he is cultivated and refined, and possesses one of the kindest, most generous natures, but——"

"But you don't want to marry him, is that it?" he interrupted.

"No, sir, I do not," she said, very firmly, but with another rush of color to the beautiful face.

Mr. Dalton's face grew dark, and he twitched nervously in his chair.

"I am sure I cannot conceive what possible objection you can have to him as a husband; he is handsome as a king,

polished, distinguished in his profession, and rich enough to surround you with every elegance the world can afford."

"I have already told you my sole objection—I do not love him," the fair girl said, wearily.

"Pshaw! I am sure he is fitted to command the love of any woman.

"Yes, sir; he is very noble, very good, very attractive; and I cannot tell you *why* I do not, but simply that I *do* not."

"And you would not accept him if he should propose for your hand?"

"No, sir," was the low but very steady reply.

Mr. Dalton's eyes flashed ominously; he was growing furious at her obstinacy.

He had decreed that she should marry the distinguished young surgeon, and who was reported heir to such large possessions.

It will be remembered that we have stated gold was Mr. Dalton's idol, consequently he was anxious to secure so valuable a prize, so that in case his own supply of this world's goods should fail him, he would have an exhaustless reservoir to which he could go and replenish.

"I desire that you consent to marry Paul Tressalia whenever he sees fit to ask you to become his wife," he said, in tones of command.

"I regret that I cannot gratify that desire, sir."

"You will not?"

"I *cannot*."

"Do you utterly refuse to do so?"

"I do most emphatically," Editha answered, coldly and decidedly.

"Perhaps your affections are already engaged—perhaps you have already experienced that passion you term 'love' for some one else?" her father said, half eagerly, half sneeringly.

"I have never been asked to marry any one; no one has ever spoken of love to me," she replied, with drooping lids and very crimson cheeks.

"That was very cleverly evaded, Miss Dalton," he returned, with a mocking laugh. "I was not speaking of the love of any one for *you*, but of *yours* for some one *else*."

"I decline to discuss the subject further with you, sir, but refuse to accept Mr. Tressalia's attentions any longer with a view to an alliance with him."

Miss Dalton was beginning to show her independent spirit.

"Perhaps," sneered Mr. Dalton, now thoroughly aroused,

and made reckless by her opposition, "your tastes would lead you to prefer to marry that handsome young convict whom you professed to admire so much once upon a time."

Mr. Dalton had had his fears upon this subject for some time, owing to the constancy with which she sent him the tokens of her remembrance; but he had never hinted at such a thing until now.

Editha's proud little head was lifted suddenly erect at his words; her eyes, blue and gentle as they were usually, had grown dark, and flashed dangerously; her nostrils dilated, and her breath came quickly from her red, parted lips.

He had touched upon a tender point.

"Papa," she cried, in proud, ringing tones, "if I loved any one, and he was worthy, I should never be ashamed of that love."

"Nor to marry its object, even though he had served a sentence in a State prison," he jeered.

"Nor to marry its object, even though he had served a matter what misfortunes had overtaken him, nor what position in life he occupied."

If Earle Wayne could have heard those words how he would have blessed their author!

"Aha!" her father cried, bitterly; "perhaps you *do* even love this—this——"

"Father!" Miss Dalton had risen now from her chair, and stood calmly confronting the enraged man; but she was very pale. "Father," she repeated, "I cannot understand why you should be so exceedingly bitter toward me whenever I happen to differ from you upon any point; neither can I understand the change in your general treatment of me during the last two years. You used to be gentle and indulgent with me until after mamma and Uncle Richard died, and it is very hard for me to bear your scorn and anger. But—please do not think I intend to be disrespectful or willful—but I consider that neither you nor any one else has a right to speak to me in the way you have done to-day regarding a subject so sacred as the disposal of my affections. They are my own, to be bestowed whenever and upon whoever my heart shall dictate. Hear me out, please," she said, as he was about to angrily interrupt her. "I claim that I have a perfect and indisputable right to judge for myself in a matter so vital to my own interests and happiness, and when the proper time comes—I shall exercise that right. Do not misunderstand me. I have no desire to displease you, nor to go contrary to your wishes. I would not seem to threaten, either; but you have wounded me more

deeply than you imagine to-day, and I must speak freely, once for all. I cannot allow any one—not even my own father—to dispose of my future for me.”

“Do I understand you to mean that you would marry a man whom everybody looked down upon and despised, if you happened to take a fancy to him?” Mr. Dalton demanded, in a voice of thunder, and utterly confounded by the girl’s independence.

“It would make no difference to me whether *others* despised him or not, if he was mentally my equal, and I considered him worthy of my affection,” was the brave, proud reply.

“Even if disgraced as a felon, as Earle Wayne has been disgraced?”

“Even if he had *innocently* suffered disgrace, and expiated another’s crime, as Earle Wayne has done, and is doing,” she answered quietly; but the deep blue eyes were hidden beneath the white lids; two very bright spots had settled on her cheeks and her hands trembled nervously.

It was cruel to wring her secret from her thus; but he was her father and she must bear it as patiently as she could.

His next words, however, acted like an electric battery upon her.

They were spoken hoarsely and menacingly:

“Editha Dalton, you are a fool and I would see your whole life a wreck before I would see you wedded to *him!*”

“Thank you, papa, for your flattering estimate of my mental faculties, and also for the tender, fraternal interest which you manifest in my future happiness; but if you please we will close the discussion here.”

With uplifted hand, flashing eyes, and a haughty little bend of her slender body, she glided quietly from the room.

“Pride in her port, defiance in her eye.”

Sumner Dalton looked after her in amaze, and ground his teeth in baffled rage.

CHAPTER VIII

HOPES AND FEARS

“WHEW!” he exclaimed, after a moment, “my beloved daughter is developing a surprising spirit. I had no idea there was so much grit bottled up in her little body. I shall

have to mind my p's and q's, or all my plans will amount to nothing; it will not do to arouse her antagonism like this. I must remember the wisdom of Burke, who sagely remarked: 'He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill; our antagonist is our helper.' I have no desire to strengthen *her* nerves, or sharpen *her* skill—clearly, opposition won't do for Editha Dalton; we must employ winning smiles, soft speeches and strategy. I must take heed to my ways, else my independent, fiery little banker will yet be refusing me the handling of her plethoric purse, and that, under the circumstances, is a pleasure I should miss exceedingly. Nevertheless, I intend to have my own way about certain matters and things."

Such was Sumner Dalton's muttered colloquy with himself, after having been so abruptly left alone by his indignant daughter.

For some time past he had made large demands upon Editha's income, giving as a reason for so doing that he had loaned largely to a friend of late, who, having failed to pay as he had promised, he was somewhat crippled in his own money affairs.

Editha, generous and tender-hearted to a fault, of course credited his statements, and immediately surrendered the most of her income into his hands, and it is needless to remark that it slipped through his fingers in the easiest manner imaginable, and he presented himself to her on quarter-day with a punctuality that was a surprising, knowing his habits, as it would in a better cause have been commendable.

But for the present he said no more to her on the subject of either Mr. Tressalia's attentions or intentions.

His manner was more affectionate and kind, and Editha began to feel that she had perhaps spoken more hastily and severely than she ought to her only parent; consequently she exerted herself more to please him for the little while they remained at Newport.

Mr. Dalton, watching his opportunity, hinted to Mr. Tressalia that perhaps it would not be well to hurry matters to a crisis, even though they had only a few days longer to remain at Newport; but he gave him a cordial invitation to visit them in their city home, encouraging him to hope that on a more intimate acquaintance he could not fail to win the fair Editha.

That gentleman appeared to see the wisdom of all this, particularly as he had noticed and been somewhat hurt by her avoidance of him, and he did not force his attentions

upon her, nor seek to monopolize her society as he had heretofore done.

So the last week of Editha's stay at the sea-side was marked by only pleasant events, and there was nothing to look upon with regret as they returned to their home for the winter.

It was the last of October when they left Newport, and the twenty-third of December was the day set for Earle Wayne's release from prison.

He had entered the tenth of April, but, according to the State law, a prisoner was allowed two days of mercy in every month for prompt obedience to the rules of the institution and the faithful performance of all duties; consequently he had gained during the three years, three months and eighteen days.

Editha knew of this through Mr. Forrester, and Earle Wayne himself did not keep a more accurate account of his time than did the fair, brave girl who, despite everything, was so true and firm a friend to him.

The first duty upon returning to her home was to write him a little note.

"MR. WAYNE," it ran, a little formal, perhaps, on account of Mr. Dalton's sneers and insinuations, "in about two months I shall expect to shake hands with you once more. Will you come directly to my home at that time, as I have an important message for you, also a package belonging to you and left in my care by Uncle Richard, just before he died?

Ever your friend,

"EDITHA DALTON."

When this note was handed to Earle, and he instantly recognized the handwriting, every particle of color forsook his face, his hand trembled, and a mist gathered before his eyes.

He had not seen that writing since his lovely flowers had ceased to come, and its familiar characters aroused so many emotions that for the moment he was nearly unmanned.

He thrust it hastily into his bosom, for he could not open it with so many eyes upon him, and there it lay all day long against his beating heart, waiting to be opened when he could be alone and unobserved.

When at last he did break the seal and read it, it was sadly disappointing.

It seemed cold and distant—a mere formal request to come and get what belonged to him and receive the message

(doubtless something regarding his studies) which Richard Forrester had left for him.

His heart was full of bitterness, for since Mr. Forrester's death he had not seen a single friendly face or received one word of kindly remembrance from any one.

He could not forget Editha's long neglect of him—the long, weary months, during which she had promised to send him some token, and none had come.

She had other cares and pleasures; her time was probably occupied by her fashionable friends and acquaintances, and it could not be expected that she would give much thought to a miserable convict; doubtless she would not have remembered him now had it not been a duty she owed to the wishes of her uncle, he reasoned, with a dreary pain in his heart.

Editha was, he knew, nearly or quite twenty now; she had already been in society nearly two years, and, perchance, she had already given her heart to some worthy, fortunate man, who could place her in a position befitting her beauty and culture; and what business had *he*, who would henceforth be a marked man—a pariah among men—to imagine that she would think of him except, perhaps, with a passing feeling of pity?

But even though he reasoned thus with himself, and tried to school his mind to think that he must never presume to believe that Editha could cherish anything of regard for him, even though she had signed herself "ever your friend," yet he experienced a dull feeling of despair creeping over him, and even the prospect of his approaching liberation could not cheer him.

He had a little box in which he treasured some dried and faded flowers—the last he had received from her—and he looked at these occasionally with a mournful smile and a swelling tenderness in his heart, and his eyes grew misty with unshed tears as he remembered the sweet-faced, impulsive girl who had so generously stood up and defended him in that crowded court-room.

He remembered how she had grieved over her own reluctantly given evidence, which had gone so far toward convicting him—how she had laid her hot cheek upon his hand and sobbed out her plea for forgiveness, and her look of firm faith and trust in him when she had told him that he did not need to prove his innocence to her, she would take his word in the face of the whole world."

A strange thrill always went through him as he thought of the burning tears she had shed for him and his sad fate,

and which had rained upon the hand which she had held clasped in both of hers.

It was a sort of sad pleasure to look back upon all this, and think how kind she had been, and in his own heart he knew that he loved her as he could never love another; but he had no right to think of her in that way. If she had only remembered him occasionally, it would not be quite so hard to bear; but she had not kept her promise—she *had* forgotten him in spite of her eager protestations that she would not.

He would gladly have gone away from the city as soon as he should be liberated, and thus avoid the pain of meeting and parting with her, but she had written and requested it, and he must have his package again, while he would treasure any message which his kind friend, Richard Forrester, had left for him.

His eyes dwelt fondly over those three last words, "ever your friend," even though he sighed as he read them.

They were stereotyped, what she might kindly have written to any unfortunate person; yet his face did brighten, and they were like precious ointment to his bruised spirit, and cheered the few remaining weeks of his stay not a little.

"Yes, I will obey her summons," he said, with a sigh, as he folded the tiny sheet, carefully replaced it in its envelope, and then returned it to that inner pocket near his heart. "I will go to her; I will look into her deep, clear eyes and fair, beautiful face once more; I will touch her soft hand once again, even if it be in a long farewell. I shall hear her speak my name, and then I will go away from her forever. To stay where I should be sure to meet her, even once in a while, and perhaps to see her happy in the love of another, would be more pain than I could bear.

"But, oh, my darling!" he cried, in a voice of anguish, "if only this terrible blight need not have come upon me—if I might but have won you, there would have come a day when I could have given you such a position as—but, ah! why do I indulge in such vain dreamings?—it can never be, and God alone can help me to bear the dread future."

Yet notwithstanding his despair of never being anything but an object of pity to the woman whom he idolized, those last two months of his stay were the brighter for the coming of that little white-winged messenger which Editha had sent him, and which day and night lay above his heart.

"Earle will be free the twenty-third—Christmas comes two days later. I will have the papers conveying Uncle

Richard's bequest made out and all ready, and he shall have it for a Christmas gift, if I can get papa's consent."

Thus Editha planned as the month of December came in cold and wintry, and growing more and more impatient with every succeeding day.

"Papa has been more kind to me of late—I do not believe but that I can persuade him to sign the papers, and then I will ask Earle to eat the Christmas goose with us. I will make everything so lovely and cheerful that he will forget those dreary walls and the long, long months he has been so cruelly detailed there."

But she realized, even as she mused and planned thus, that she would doubtless have trouble regarding these matters; and yet she hoped against hope.

"Papa *cannot* be so cruel. I shall get Mr. Felton to intercede for me—it is such a little sum compared with the whole, and the money would do Earle so much good; it will help him to hold up his head until he gets nicely started in business for himself. I wonder if he is changed much?" she went on, with heightened color and a quickly beating heart, as she remembered the strong, proud face, with its dark, handsome eyes, the tender yet manly mouth, which used to part into such a luminous smile whenever he looked up to her. "I wonder if he has liked my flowers?—how fond of them he always was! I will have them everywhere about the house on Christmas Day. There shall be no other guests except Mr. Felton; I will coax papa to let me have it all my own way for once, and I will try and make Earle forget."

Thus day by day she thought of him and planned for his comfort and happiness. The days grew longer and longer to her as the time drew nearer, until she became so restless, nervous and impatient, that her appetite failed, and all her interest in other things waned.

The week before Christmas she sought her lawyer, and had a long talk with him regarding her uncle's strange bequest.

It was the first he had heard of it, for she had been loth to say much about it, knowing her father's bitter opposition. But it could be put off no longer, and she hoped Mr. Dalton would be ashamed to refuse his signature when the paper should be presented by the lawyer; and though Mr. Felton was somewhat surprised at the information, yet his admiration for the fair girl increased fourfold as he observed how heartily she appeared to second Mr. Forrester's wishes.

"I will make out the papers with pleasure, Miss Editha,"

he said; "you want them for Christmas Day—they shall be ready, and a fine gift it will be for the young man. Poor fellow! I always felt sorry for him, he was such a promising chap; and I'm glad he's going to have something to start with—he'll need it bad enough with every man's hand against him."

"Yes, sir; but I believe Mr. Wayne will live down his misfortune and command the respect of every one who ever knew him," said Editha flushing.

She did not like to hear Earle hinted in that way, as if he had fallen into sudden temptation and was guilty; she *knew* he was innocent, and she wanted everybody else to think so, too.

"You will come and dine with us that day, will you not, Mr. Felton? I shall invite Earle to dinner. I want to make the day pleasant for him if I can—he is so alone in the world, you know," she added.

Mr. Felton searched the flushed face keenly a moment, then said:

"Thank you, Miss Editha; I shall be happy to do so, as I am also somewhat alone in the world—that is, if it will be agreeable to all parties. Have you talked this matter over with Mr. Dalton? Does he approve of the measures you are taking?"

Editha's face clouded.

"No," she answered, reluctantly; "papa does not approve of my giving Mr. Wayne the money; but, of course, it must be done. It was Uncle Richard's wish."

"Ahem! Excuse me, Miss Editha, but how old are you?" Mr. Felton asked, reflectively.

"I was twenty the twentieth of November, but——"

"Then you will not be of age until the twentieth of *next* November. I am sorry to disappoint you; but since this bequest was not included in the will of Mr. Forrester, and you are under age, you can convey no property to any one without Mr. Dalton's sanction."

Editha's face was very sad and perplexed.

"So papa told me himself," she sighed. "Is there *no* way, Mr. Felton, that I can give Earle this money without his signing the papers?"

"I am afraid not. He is your natural guardian, and everything will have to be submitted to his approval, at least until the twentieth of next November, nearly a year."

"But Uncle Richard made me promise that I would give it to Mr. Wayne just as soon as his time expired, and *I must do it*," Editha said, almost in tears.

She had hoped that Mr. Felton could find a way to help her out of this trouble.

"The law is a hard master sometimes," he said, sympathizing with her evident distress; "but I will make out the papers as you desire, and perhaps we can advise and prevail upon your father to do what is right on Christmas Day."

"Then you do think it is right Earle should have this money?" she asked, eagerly.

"Certainly, if it was Mr. Forrester's wish, since the money was his own to do with as he chose; but I am sorry he was not able to add a codicil to his will. It would have saved all this trouble, for no one could have gainsaid that. Do not be discouraged, however; we may be able to persuade Mr. Dalton to see things as we do. You shall have the papers by the twenty-fifth."

"I have been thinking," Editha said, musingly, "that if you could have it before, and we could get papa to sign it, it might save some unpleasant feelings. If we should wait until Christmas Day, and he should refuse before Earle, it might make him very uncomfortable."

"Perhaps that would be the better way, and I will attend to it for you as soon as possible," Mr. Felton assented.

Editha went home in rather a doubtful frame of mind.

"What will Earle do if papa will not consent?" she murmured, the tears chasing each other down her cheeks. "He will not have any money, and, with no one to hold out a helping hand, he will become disheartened."

"A clear case of love!" Mr. Felton said, thoughtfully, upon Edith's departure. "It's too bad, too, for, of course it would never do for her to marry him, with the stigma upon his character. Poor fellow! he'll have a hard time of it if Dalton won't give in, for people are mighty shy of jail-birds, be they ever so promising; and her father, according to my way of thinking, loves money too well to give up a pretty sum like ten thousand."

CHAPTER IX

"THAT IS MY ULTIMATUM"

THE twenty-third of December arrived, and Earle Wayne was a free man once more.

Who can portray his feelings as, once more clad in the

habiliments of a citizen—his prison garb, like the chrysalis of the grub, having dropped from him forever—he came forth into the world and sought the haunts of men? No one can do justice to them; such feelings are indescribable.

Earle Wayne was not twenty-three years old.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, and stalwart of form.

His face was the face of nature's nobleman; a clear, dark skin, eyes of deep hazel, with hair of just a darker shade crowning a forehead broad, full, and at every point well developed.

His nose was somewhat large, and of the Roman type; his mouth sweet and gentle in expression, but full of manly strength and firmness; it had also now something of sadness in its lines, from the long term of cruel endurance and restraint which he had undergone.

But his step was as free and proud, his head as erect, his gaze as clear and unflinching as before any one had dared to accuse him of having robbed his fellow-man, or he had served a criminal's sentence.

And why not?

He had not sinned; he had done no wrong; he had never wilfully harmed a human being in all his life. His own conscience told him he was as true and noble a man at heart as any that walked the earth; and he would not sacrifice his self-respect because, upon circumstantial evidence, he had been obliged to serve out a sentence in a State prison for another man's crime.

He returned to the city that had been his home before his imprisonment, and where he had served three pleasant years with Richard Forrester, and where now, since he was dead and gone, he had no hope of having a friendly hand extended to him. His first night he spent in a quiet, but respectable hotel, and slept restfully and well.

The next morning Mr. Felton wended his way, with the all-important document which Editha desired in his pocket, to Mr. Dalton's residence on —th street.

He meant to have attended to it before, but had been unexpectedly called from town on business the morning after Editha's visit to him, and had had no time until then to go to her.

Editha was in a fever of anxiety and impatience on account of it, and for two whole days had watched for his coming from her window almost incessantly.

When at last she saw him ascending the steps, she sped to the door and answered his ring, whereupon she led him directly to the library, where her father was sitting.

"Papa," she said, speaking as indifferently as she could, after the two men had exchanged greetings, "Mr. Felton has called to-day to settle that business of Uncle Richard's bequest to Mr. Wayne."

Mr. Dalton started and flushed angrily, frowning darkly upon her; then by an effort curbing his anger, he turned to the lawyer with a light laugh.

"Has this young lady been importuning you also upon her sentimental whims?" he asked.

"Miss Editha called several days ago and told me of her uncle's request, and asked me to prepare the necessary documents," Mr. Felton replied, quietly, and with a sympathetic glance at Editha's hot cheeks.

"Well, what do you think of it? Did you ever hear of such a piece of foolishness as she contemplates?"

"It is a question with me whether it is a piece of foolishness to desire to fulfill the request of a dying man," returned the lawyer, gravely.

Editha gave him a grateful look.

"Pshaw! Richard Forrester did not know what he was about. He was a feeble paralytic, and not accountable for what he said at that time," said Mr. Dalton, impatiently.

"Oh, papa! how can you say that, when you know that his mind was perfectly clear?" Editha exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Did you invite Mr. Felton here to-day to argue this point with me?" he demanded sharply of her.

"I asked him, as he has stated, to prepare the necessary papers to settle this money upon Mr. Wayne, hoping that he might convince you that it is best to allow me to do so."

"Indeed!"

"You know Earle's time expired yesterday, and I am expecting him every moment," Editha said, with some agitation.

"*You are expecting him every moment!*" repeated Mr. Dalton, growing excited also, though in a different way, and from a different cause.

He had not forgotten the night that he had stolen into her library and tampered with the package committed to her care, nor what secrets that package contained.

"Yes, sir; I wrote to him to come directly here as soon as he was free."

"And, pray, did you tell him what he was to come for?" thundered Mr. Dalton, in a rage.

"I told him I had a message for him, and also a package belonging to him," Editha said, quietly.

She was growing more calm as he became excited.

"Did you ever hear of such folly?" he asked of Mr. Felton.

"I think Miss Dalton is perfectly right in wishing to carry out her uncle's desires. She will have a large fortune left, even after giving up the ten thousand, and my advice to you would be to put no obstacle in her path. Of course, I know she cannot do this without your consent—at least, not at present."

"Of course not; and I shall not allow it. I am surprised that a man of your prudence and judgment should advise such a thing," Mr. Dalton answered with some heat.

"I simply believe in doing as we would be done by. Put yourself in young Wayne's place Mr. Dalton and consider whether a little friendly help from the dead friend who was always so kind to him would not be very acceptable just at this time," Mr. Felton answered earnestly.

A dark flush mounted to Mr. Dalton's brow at these words. Put himself in Earle Wayne's—*her son's*—place! Imagine him to be in the position of the man he had such cause to hate! The thought stirred all the bad blood in his nature.

"He shall never have *one penny* of my daughter's fortune. I will never put my name to any paper like what you have brought here to-day!" he cried angrily and smiting the table near which he sat heavily.

"Papa let me plead with you" Editha said gently beseechingly. "I *promised* to do this thing at this time. Please do not make me break my word; for *my* sake let me do as Uncle Richard wished; *do* not force me to do a *worse* thing than that for which Earle was so cruelly sentenced!"

"I force you to commit no robbery! Girl, what do you mean? I am preventing you from robbing yourself!" he cried, angrily.

"Not so, Mr. Dalton," Mr. Felton said, with dignity; for he longed to pommel the man for speaking so to the beautiful girl before him. "I can appreciate Miss Editha's feelings; she not only wishes to befriend this unfortunate young man on her own account, but she believes that after to-day the ten thousand dollars are no longer hers. Richard Forrester gave the sum from his own property before it became hers, to young Wayne, and, if you refuse to allow her to settle it upon him, *you* are not only committing a wrong, but forcing her to commit one also."

"Do I understand that you two are trying to make me out a thief?" demanded Mr. Dalton, hoarsely.

"It is an ugly word; but, morally speaking, I should say it was the right one to use in this case; legally, however,

since there was no codicil to the will, I suppose Miss Dalton is entitled to everything," Mr. Felton observed, dryly, with a scornful curve of his lip.

Mr. Dalton for a moment was too enraged to reply; then he burst forth:

"I will see him in — before he shall ever touch a penny of her money! That is my ultimatum."

Mr. Felton, upon this, turned to Editha, who was standing, very pale, by the table.

Her father's anger and words had shocked her beyond expression; but they had also aroused some of the reserve force of her character.

"In that case, Miss Editha, my services are not needed here to-day. I suppose I shall destroy the document I have prepared?"

"No, *sir!* Keep it if you please."

"Keep it! What for, pray?" demanded her father, with a sneer.

She turned to him very quietly, but with a mien which he was learning to dread, and said, in low, firm tones:

"I shall be twenty-one, sir, in a little less than a year, and, according to the law of the land, my own mistress. I shall not then need to obtain the consent of an, one in order to do as I like with my money. On the twentieth of November next Earle Wayne will receive his ten thousand dollars, *with a year's interest added*. That is the best I can do."

Then, without waiting for Mr. Dalton to reply, and wholly ignoring his dark looks, she turned to Mr. Felton, with one of her charming smiles, and said:

"We will drop our business for to-day; and, as there is the lunch-bell, won't you come out and try the merits of a cup of coffee and a plate of chicken salad?"

The lawyer regarded her with a gleam of admiration in his fine old eyes; he had not thought she possessed so much character.

"No, I thank you," he replied, thinking it best to get out of the tempest as soon as practicable. "You know it is the day before Christmas, and that is usually a busy time; besides, I have another engagement in half an hour, and there is barely time to reach my office. You will also excuse me for to-morrow," he added, in a lower tone; and Editha knew that, after what had occurred to-day, it would be no pleasure to him to dine with them, as she had asked him to do. She knew, too, that her little plan regarding making a pleasant day for Earle was blighted.

He bowed coldly to Mr. Dalton, and Editha followed him to the door.

"Do not worry over what you cannot help, Miss Editha; eleven months won't be so very long to wait, and, meanwhile, if you will send young Wayne to me, I think I can put him in a way to keep his head above water until that time," he said, kindly, as he shook her hand in farewell at the door.

Editha thanked him, with tears in her eyes, and then would have sought her own rooms, but she heard her father calling her, and so she returned to the library, though she dreaded another scene.

"A fine spectacle you have made of yourself to-day," were the sneering, angry words which greeted her entrance.

She walked quietly to where he sat, and stood before him; but two very bright spots now relieved her unusual paleness.

"Did you wish anything particular of me, papa? If not, I think it would be better not to keep lunch waiting any longer," she said gently, though with an evident effort at self-control.

"Do I want anything of you? I would like to give you a wholesome shaking for what you have done to-day."

She lifted her head, and encountered his two blazing, angry eyes, her own glance clear, steadfast, and unflinching.

"You are a wilful little—fool!" he said, nettled by her calm demeanor, and almost beside himself with rage.

Still she said nothing, and he instantly grew ashamed of those last words.

"You have no idea how angry you have made me to-day," he said, half apologetically.

"I have no desire to make you angry, sir. I only desire and *intend* to do right," she answered, quietly.

"Intend! Is that a threat?"

"No, sir—merely a statement of a fact."

"And refers to what you said just before Mr. Felton went out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Edith Dalton, if you dare to defy me in this thing, I'll make your life so miserable that you will wish you were dead," he said, in concentrated tones of passion.

She paled again at the fearful words, and a keen pain smote her heart that her own father should speak thus to her; then she replied, steadily:

"I have no wish to defy you, sir, but——"

"But you will not obey me—you would set my authority aside if you could," he interrupted.

"I acknowledge your authority as the highest of any on earth, and I will yield you cheerful obedience in all that is right—beyond that I cannot go, I *will* not go. I have reached an age where I am capable of judging for myself upon all moral questions, and I must exercise that judgment."

"This is a point of business, upon which you set aside my wishes and my authority," he said, moodily, and his eyes wavering uneasily beneath her steady gaze.

"It involves the principles of right and wrong also. I promised that Earl Wayne should have this money, and if you will not let me give it to him now, I shall pay it to him, as I said, a year from now, with interest."

He knew she meant it, and, in his passion, he half raised his clenched hand as if to strike her.

But the soft blue eyes, with the keen pain in them, disarmed him, and it dropped heavily back upon the arm of his chair.

"Oh, papa," she said, her voice full of unshed tears, "why need we disagree upon so slight a thing?"

"Do you call a matter involving ten thousand dollars a slight thing?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Yes, in comparison with what will remain, my father," laying her hand softly on his shoulder and pleading in tones that ought to have melted a harder heart. "Let us do what is right; let us be friends and united in heart, instead of growing so widely apart as we have been during the past year or two."

"You will not yield to me."

"In all that is right, I shall be only too glad to," she answered, with a heavy sigh.

"But you persist in giving this money to that——"

"*I must.* That is settled," she interrupted, firmly, and to prevent the utterance of some obnoxious word, she knew not what.

"Never—*never!* Do you think I would let you give it to him—*him* of all others in the world?"

Edith regarded him in surprise at these excited words. They seemed to imply a deadly hatred for which she could not account, knowing that Earle had never done her father any injury.

"A thief—a robber—a criminal!" he added, noticing her look, and having no desire to have her inquire into the real nature of his hatred.

"Earle never was either of those," she said, proudly.

"No matter; he has suffered the disgrace of them all, and

there can be no peace between you and me until you promise to yield to me."

"I cannot in this instance."

"Then the consequences be upon your own head. I'll try and have patience with you until the year is out; then, if you defy me, I'll make you rue it. Go!" and he pointed impatiently toward the door.

Without a word, Editha glided from the room, her heart heavy and sore.

Soon after she heard him leave the house, and ten minutes later there came a ring at the door that, spite of her pain, sent the rosy blood leaping to her very brow, in a burning tide, and made her heart leap like a frightened bird in her bosom.

"Earle has come," she murmured, as she sat listening for the servant to come to summon her, and trying to still her throbbing nerves.

CHAPTER X

"MY LIFE SHALL BE FOURSQUARE"

THE servant who answered the ring at Mr. Dalton's door found standing there a tall, dignified young man, with the unmistakable stamp of the gentleman upon him.

To his inquiry if Miss Dalton was at home, he replied that she was, and ushered him into a small reception-room opposite the drawing-room.

"Take this, if you please, to her," Earle Wayne said, handing the man a blank, unsealed envelope.

The servant took it with a bow and withdrew, wondering what that spotless envelope contained, and who the gentleman was who sent no card—unless, perhaps, it might be in the envelope, and was intended for Edith's eyes alone.

The fair girl arose with apparent calmness at his rap, and, taking the missive from his hand, opened it, and found within her own note, that she had written bidding Earle come to her as soon as he should be free.

At that moment she realized how very short and formal it was, and a feeling of remorse stole into her heart that she had not written more freely and kindly, in spite of her sensitiveness at her father's sneers and insinuations.

Waiting a moment or two to cool the hot color in her cheeks, and to still the fierce beating of her heart, she then

went slowly and trembling down to meet the brave hero, whom she had not seen for nearly three years.

Would he be much changed? Would he be pale, haggard, and miserable in appearance? Would he look the same, and speak the same, as he had done on that sad day when she had bidden him farewell and left him to go to his dreary fate within those four gloomy walls, or would he be broken and disheartened, and feel that the future held nothing but scorn and contempt for him?

She had read of men, noble, spirited, and energetic, who, having been imprisoned for a term of years, were ruined by it, and who had settled down into an existence of profound melancholy and inaction upon regaining their freedom.

Would Earle be like this?

These were some of the anxious questions which flitted through her mind on the way from her chamber to the reception-room, where Earle, with equal agitation, was awaiting her coming.

She opened the door softly and went in.

He did not hear her—he was standing at a window, his back toward her, and absorbed in thought.

As if shod with velvet, Editha crossed the room and stood at his side.

Her eyes had lighted wondrously as they rested upon the proud, handsome figure before her, and the rich color coming and going in her cheeks made her marvelously beautiful.

"Earle, I am so glad you have come," she said, simply, yet with tremulous tones that betrayed her gladness was almost unto tears, while with something of her old impulse she held out both fair hands to him.

He started and turned quickly at the sweet tones, and searched the glowing face with eager scrutiny.

Could this tall, beautiful woman, with the shining, silken crown about her shapely head, with her deep, glowing eyes, her rich, varying color, her cordial, tremulous greeting, be the same Editha of three years ago?

She had been a fair, plump, and laughing girl, her sunny hair falling in graceful waves over her rounded shoulders, her eyes dancing with fun and merriment, her moods never twice the same, a creature of heart and impulse.

Now her form was grown; she was more fully developed, with a stately poise which she was not wont to have; her features were more deeply lined with character, and glorified with a richer, more mature beauty, and the waving, sunny hair had been gathered up and wreathed her head in a plaited golden coronet.

But these eyes—those clear, truthful, heaven-blue eyes were the same; the smile was the same upon the scarlet lips, and the sweet, tender tremulous tones were the same; he had never forgotten their music, and his heart bounded with a joy that was almost pain as they again fell upon his ear.

"Earle, I am so glad you have come."

Words so simple, yet full of heartfelt gladness, never greeted mortal ears before.

He grasped both her outstretched hands, forgetting all her supposed neglect of him, and without the least hesitation as to his own worthiness to do so.

He knew he was worthy—his hands, morally speaking, were as fair and free from stain as her own.

Yet he had not expected to find her so cordial and glad to see him, and her manner filled him with deepest gratitude and admiration.

"Editha—Miss Dalton," he said, his whole face glowing, "I thank you for your words of welcome—I cannot doubt their heartiness."

"Of course not; why should you, Earle?" she asked, with some surprise, as she searched his face.

"I told you that I should not forget you—that I should always be your friend; what reason could you have to think I would not greet you heartily?" she urged, a little look of grieved surprise in her eyes.

"I should not if—if—pardon me, I ought not to speak thus. Have you been well?" and he tried to change the subject.

"Quite well; and you?"

"Do not my looks speak for me?" he asked, smiling, yet with the shadow deepening in his eyes.

He might be well physically, but it would take a long while to heal the wound in his soul.

"Earle," Editha said, gravely, meeting his eyes with a steady, earnest look, "what made you speak as you did about doubting the heartiness of my welcome? I can see that you have some reason for it; please tell me—surely you did not think I would have broken my promise—my flowers must have proven that I did not forget."

Earle gave her a quick, surprised glance.

"That was just why I was in doubt," he said, flushing slightly. "I have not received a single token of remembrance from you for nearly two years."

"Earle!"

Editha instantly grew crimson to the line of gold above

her forehead, then white as the delicate lace at her throat at this startling intelligence.

What could this strange thing mean? Who could have appropriated her flowers and kept them from him?

Then, with a feeling of shame, not unmixed with indignation, her heart told her that her *father*, in his prejudice against Earle, must have intercepted them.

"How cruel!" she murmured. "I do not wonder that you doubted my friendship; but, to exonerate myself, I must tell you that every week I have sent you flowers, or fruit, or *something*, to show you that you were remembered—not once have I failed."

"Then forgive me for all the hard things I have thought," he said, in tones of self-reproach. "I can never tell you how those sweet little messages cheered me during my first year in—that place, nor how dreary and lonely I was when they came no longer to brighten my gloomy cell. After Mr. Forrester died," he continued, with emotion, "I felt as if my only friend had been taken from me. I had not one to whom to turn for a ray of comfort."

"I know," Editha said, with starting tears, then, with rising color, "if you had only dropped me a line, I would have taken care that my offerings reached you safely after that."

"You know the old saying, 'one may as well be neglected as forgotten;' I never mistrusted that they had been sent and failed to reach their destination, and so imagined a good many things I had no right to, and——"

"And were too proud to remind me of my negligence," Editha interrupted, with a smile.

"Doubtless some enemy has done this, or they could not *all* have missed coming to me. Am I forgiven for doubting my stanch little friend?" he asked, gently.

"Freely; I could not blame you under the circumstances."

"Then let us talk of something else," Earle said for he began to mistrust from Editha's manner *who* had been the guilty one. "Tell me of Mr. Forrester and of yourself during these years."

And thus their conversation drifted to other subjects, and, as they conversed, their old freedom of manner returned in a measure—in a measure, I repeat, for there could not be quite the former carelessness and sparkle, while each was trying to conceal the secret which their hearts held, and which, for the time, at least, they felt they must not reveal.

Earle told her of his life in prison—of how he had spent

his time—of the knowledge he had acquired, and something of his plans for the future.

"Earle," she said, glancing up at him through the tears she could not restrain, when he had completed his account, "you have borne it so nobly, this suffering for another, that I want to tell you how proud I am of you; and Uncle Richard would say the same thing if he were living."

"Thank you," he said, with emotion; "it is almost worth having been a prisoner for three years to hear you say that. If only the world might feel as assured of my innocence as you do, and hold out the same friendly hand of welcome," he concluded, with a sigh.

"It will in time, Earle—I feel sure that some day your innocence will be established."

"I shall devote my energies to that purpose, and if the guilty ones are never brought to justice, I will *live* my innocence. I will prove it by my life—my life shall be *four-square*, and I will yet command the faith and respect of all who know me. It will be hard, but I shall strive to fight my battle bravely, and I feel that I shall conquer in the end. You know Pope tells us that 'He's armed *without* that's innocent *within*.'"

"You *will* succeed—you cannot fail with such an earnest purpose in your heart," Editha said, eagerly; then she added, musingly: "You said you would make your life 'four-square.' I do not think I quite understand that."

Earle Wayne smiled a rare, sweet smile, as, leaning nearer his fair companion, he said, in a low, reverent tone:

"You have read of the 'city that lieth foursquare,' whose length is as large as its breadth, whose 'walls are of jasper,' and whose 'gates are of pearl.' That city, Editha, a perfect square, and embellished with the most precious stones, is, I believe, the emblem or symbol of a pure and perfect life, and so, with the help of God, I mean that mine shall be 'foursquare.'"

Editha gave him a look as if she thought it could not be far from that even now.

After a moment of silence he continued:

"From my early boyhood I have always had a desire to become a thoroughly good man—a man honored and respected by my fellow-men. My mother ever tried to impress me never to be guilty of a mean or ignoble action. I thought her the perfection of womanhood while she lived, and have tried to treasure her precepts since she died; so you can judge something of what I have endured in the disgrace of serving out a criminal's sentence. I could not speak of

this to any one else," he added, with some excitement; "but you have been so kind and sympathizing that it relieves my burden somewhat to speak of it to you."

Editha did not reply—she had no words with which to answer him; but she lifted her blue eyes to his face, and he saw that they were full of tears.

"I am glad," Earle went on, a slight tremulousness in his tones, "that my mother did not live to know of my deep trouble—much as I have needed her sympathy, love, and counsel—for she must have suffered torture on account of it. If she knows anything about it now, she knows that I am innocent, and also just why this sad experience was permitted to come to me."

"Earle, how deeply you have suffered from it," Editha said, almost awed by the intensity of his feeling, and wondering, too, at his way of looking at the past, as if in some way his trial was meant for his ultimate good.

"But I will rise above it yet; it may be hard for me to battle against the frowns and distrust of the world for awhile, but I shall not allow them to dishearten me—if only I had a few more friends," he added, wistfully.

"You cannot long be without them, with such nobility and resolution in your soul," Editha answered, her face glowing with admiration for him, "and you may count me the warmest of them all until you find a better."

She involuntarily held out her hand as if to seal the compact as she spoke.

He grasped it eagerly, his whole face luminous with sudden joy; his breath came quickly, his broad breast rose and fell, his eyes sought hers with an intensity of expression that made her veil them with her white lids.

She did not know how she was tempting him—she could not know how he had grown to love her during the past six years, and how sweet and cheering her sympathy was to him just now, when he felt himself so friendless and alone in the great cold world.

"God bless you, Editha! If—I——"

He had begun to speak in low, concentrated tones, but now he stopped short, as if some great inward shock had suddenly cut off his power of speech.

He shut his teeth tightly together and drew in his breath with a quick gasp; the great veins in his forehead filled and stood out full and purple, and his hands locked themselves together with the intensity of some deep, inward emotion.

One quick, searching look Editha flashed up at him, and

then her eyes fell again, a rosy flush rising to her very brow at what she had seen on his face.

"I beg your pardon," he said at length, nervously pushing back the hair from his brow; "I fear you will think me very thoughtless and selfish to weary you thus with my troubles."

"No, Earle, I—am *glad* that you think me worthy of your confidence," she answered, softly.

He looked at her in surprise.

How exceedingly beautiful she was, sitting there with her downcast eyes, the lovely color in her face, and the womanly sympathy beaming in every feature.

"Worthy!" he repeated.

"Yes, worthy," she said, her lips relaxing just a trifle into a tremulous smile. "I would like to be your friend in all your troubles—maybe I could help you if you would trust me enough to tell me of them. I used to think there was no one like you when I was a wild and impulsive girl, and you were with Uncle Richard—you were always so upright so strong, and self-reliant."

"You *used* to think that of me, Editha?" he said, flushing again and trembling.

If she had known how her words moved him—but she did not dream of his love for her.

He began to grow dizzy with the new, delicious hope that seized him as she spoke.

Could it be that this fair girl had learned to love him?

He had thought of her night and day, at his work and in his lonely cell, and her image would be stamped indelibly on his heart as long as he should live.

But he had no right to speak one word of it to her now—his disgrace clung to him, and would clog him, perhaps, for long years.

Oh! if he could but break the cruel fetters that bound him—if he could but discover the real criminal, and clear his own name, then he might hope to win the respect of the world once more, fame and position, and the right to tell this gentle girl how dear she was to him.

"Yes," she returned, noticing his emphasis, and fearing she might have wounded him by wording her sentence thus; "and, Earle. I think you are very—very noble now, to bear your trouble so patiently and uncomplainingly, and something tells me that it will not be so very long before all the world will be proud to call you friend."

She spoke softly, but in a tone that thrilled him through and through.

"And then——"

The words came breathlessly, and before he could stop them. They would not be stayed.

He bent eagerly toward her, his heart in his eyes, his face full of passion which so nearly mastered him.

But he checked them, biting them off short as he had done before, but growing white even to his lips with the effort it cost him.

Something in his tones made her start and look up, and she read it all as in an open book—all his love for her, all the blighted hopes of the past, the longing and bitterness of the present, wherein he writhed beneath the stigma resting upon him, and the mighty self-control which would not presume upon her sympathy.

A flood of crimson suddenly dyed her face and throat, and even the soft, white hands which lay in her lap, and which were now seized with nervous trembling.

Then a look of resolution gleamed in her eyes, the red lips settled into an expression of firmness, and, though her heart beat like the frightened thing it was, her sweet tones did not falter as she replied:

"And then—*Editha Dalton will be very proud also.*"

Was ever heaven's music sweeter than those few low-spoken, unfaltering words?

There was no mistaking them—they had been uttered with a purpose, and he knew that his love was returned.

Eager brown eyes looked into tender blue for one long, delicious minute. No word was spoken, but both knew that for all time they belonged to each other.

Then Earle Wayne, with a glad, though solemn light illumining his face, lifted the white hand that lay nearest him, touched it reverently with his lips, and then gently laid it back in its place.

It was as though he blessed her for the hope thus delicately held out to him, but his innate nobility and self-respect would not allow him to bind her to him by so much as a word until he could stand proudly before her and offer her a name that should not have so much as the shadow of a stain upon it.

CHAPTER XI

THE BUNCH OF HOLLY

"Silence is the perfect herald of joy;
I were but little happy if I could say how much."

Words were never more applicable than these to those undeclared lovers, sitting in such a mute happiness side by side,

in the little reception-room, on that bright morning so near Christmastide.

Editha was the first to break the spell.

"I have not told you Uncle Richard's message yet," she said, and an expression of anxiety for the moment chased the radiant look from her face.

"True—it was like his kindness to remember me," Earle returned, a shadow stealing over his fine face.

"He thought a great deal of you, and had great hopes for your future——"

"Which, if it amounts to anything, will be in a great measure owing to his goodness," he interrupted, with emotion.

"Yes, Uncle Richard was a true, good man; but, Earle, now I have something unpleasant to tell you. I—he left you a *token* of his remembrance."

She hesitated, and he said, with a smile:

"I'm sure there is nothing unpleasant about that."

"No; but wait," she began, in some confusion and hardly knowing how to go on with her disagreeable task; "he left you a little money, ten thousand dollars, to give you a start in life, he said."

Earle Wayne startled and flushed deeply.

"Did Mr. Forrester do that?" he asked, greatly moved.

"Yes; and now comes the disagreeable part of it all. I do not like to tell you, but I must," she said, lifting her crimson, troubled face to him, and he wondered what there was about it that should make her appear so. "Papa did not like it very well," she went on, dropping her eyes with a feeling of shame. "He thought that it was not right the money should go to a stranger, and—and—oh! Earle, I know it seems selfish and cruel, but he says you cannot have it."

Editha nearly broke down here; it had required all her courage to tell him this; and now she sat still, covered with shame and confusion. A shade of bitterness passed over the young man's face at her last words, and then the least smile of scorn curled his fine lips.

He had never experienced very much respect for Sumner Dalton; he knew him to be a man devoid of principle, of small mind, and smaller soul; but he was Editha's father, and he could speak no word against him. He saw how ashamed and uncomfortable she felt to be obliged to make this humiliating confession regarding her only parent, while he admired the fine sense of honor that would not allow her to shrink from her duty in telling him.

"I am going to tell you just how the matter stands," she resumed presently: "and then you must excuse papa as best

you can. You doubtless have heard that Uncle Richard was paralyzed—he had no use of either his hands or his feet, and was entirely helpless, although his mind was clear until just before his second shock, which came suddenly in the night. He told me the day before that he knew he could not live, and gave me directions just what to do. He said if he could only use his hands, he would have added a codicil to his will in your favor, but as it was, I must attend to his wishes. He said it—the will—had been made many years ago, giving everything to me; but ever since he became interested in you he had intended doing something handsome for you; if he had lived and you wished it, he would have wanted you to go back to him as a partner in his business, as soon as you should be free to do so. But he charged me—*made me promise*—to make over to you ten thousand dollars as soon as your time expired.

“He left a large fortune, more than I shall ever know what to do with, and I was *so glad* of this bequest to you,” Editha went on, heartily. “I asked Mr. Felton to see that everything was done properly, so that you could have the money at once. He did so, and I wanted you to have it as a sort of Christmas-gift; but, Earle, I am not twenty-one yet; papa is still my natural guardian.”

“Well?” Earle said, encouragingly, as she stopped in distress, and he pitied her for having to make this confession to him, while a tender smile wreathed his lips at her truthfulness and her sorrow on his account.

“So there is no way—you will have to wait a little while for your money. I shall be twenty-one the twentieth of next November, and my own mistress; and, Earle, you shall have it then, with the year’s interest added.”

He nearly laughed to see how eager she was for him to have exactly his due; then he grew suddenly grave, and said, gently but firmly:

“No, Editha, I do not wish, I cannot take *one dollar* of this money.”

“But it was Uncle Richard’s dying wish and bequest to you—it *belongs* to you by *right*,” she pleaded, bitterly disappointed by his refusal to take it.

“No, by your uncle’s will, which he did not any way change, it all belongs to you.”

“But he would have changed the will if he could have held a pen; he said so; and the money is not mine,” she cried, almost in tears.

“The law would judge differently—your father is right.

It should not come to me"—this was said with a touch of bitterness, however—"and I will not have one dollar of it."

"Supposing that you were in my place just now, and I in yours, would you claim that it all belonged to you?" she asked, lifting her searching glance to his face.

"No," he said; "but the difference in our positions, because I am *not* in your place and you in mine, alters the case altogether."

"I cannot agree with you; and you would have considered me mean and dishonorable if I had taken advantage of the will and claimed the whole, would you not?"

"But you did not; you have done your duty, and consequently have nothing to regret." Earle replied, evasively.

"But you did not answer my question," Editha persisted; "would you think that I had done right if I had not wished to give you this money and withheld it from you?"

"N-o," he admitted, reluctantly.

"And, morally speaking, it does not belong to me."

"The will gave you everything——"

"That is not the question," she interrupted. "If you were pleading the case for some one else, you would claim that the money did not belong to me, and that, morally speaking, I had no right whatever to it?"

"Editha, you should be a lawyer yourself."

"That is a side issue; as they say in court, stick to the point, if you please," she again interrupted; "have I not stated the truth?"

"I am obliged to confess that you have; but, Editha, I do not want the money, though I am very grateful to Mr. Forrester for his kindness in remembering me, and to you for wishing to carry out his wishes so faithfully."

"Please, Earle, take it; I *want* you to have it, and I wish to do just as he told me to do; you will wound me deeply if you refuse it," she urged.

It was a very sweet, earnest face that looked up into his, and, had she pleaded for almost anything else, Earle would have found it impossible to resist her. His own face grew grave, almost sorrowful, as he returned:

"I would not cause you a moment's unnecessary pain, Editha, but I must be firm in this decision. Forgive me if I wound you; but, on the whole, I am glad that Mr. Dalton win a name and position entirely by my own merits. By my own strong arm will I carve out my future and win my way in the world; by my own indomitable will and energy, with the help of a greater than I, I will rise to honor, and *not* upon the foundation that another has built," he concluded,

with an earnestness and solemnity that made Editha's heart thrill with pride and the conviction of his ultimate success.

"You are very brave," she said, with admiring but still wistful eyes. "But suppose Uncle Richard *had* added a codicil to his will in your favor, what then?"

A smile of amusement curled his lips.

"Then I suppose the wheels of my car of ambition would have been unavoidably clogged with this fortune. It would not then have been optional with me whether I would have it or not."

"It shall not be now; the money is not mine—I *will not* keep it. I should be as bad as those wretches who robbed us, and then left you to suffer for their crime," Editha exclaimed, passionately, and almost in despair at his obstinacy.

"I do not see how you can do otherwise than keep it; every one will tell you that it is legally yours."

"There is many a moral wrong perpetuated under the cloak of 'legality,'" she began, somewhat sarcastically, then continued, more earnestly: "My proud, self-willed knight, whose watchwords are truth and honor, whose life is to be 'foursquare,' do you think there are no others whose natures are reaching out after the same heights? There *are* others, Earle," she said, more softly, with glowing cheeks and drooping lids, "who look with longing eyes toward the 'jasper' walls,' and 'gates of pearl;' and can one be 'true and honorable' and keep what does not belong to one?"

"How can I convince you, Editha, that I *cannot* take this money?"

"But what *will* you do, Earle? How will you begin life again?" she asked, anxiously.

"I have a little, enough for that, laid by; and now, with three years' interest added, it will be sufficient to give me a start, and I shall do very well. Do not allow my refusal to comply with your wishes to disturb you. Try to imagine that if Mr. Forrester had never known me he would never have thought of making a change in the disposition of his property," Earle concluded, lightly.

"But the *if* exists, nevertheless. He *did* make the change; and, once for all, I will not have my conscience burdened with what is not my own. Earle, on the twentieth of next November I shall deposit in the First National Bank of this city ten thousand dollars, with a year's interest, to your credit," she asserted, resolutely. "Meanwhile," she added, "Mr. Felton told me to say to you that he thought he could arrange some way for you to keep your head above board, if you will go to him."

"I thank Mr. Felton, but I think the term 'self-willed' may be applied to some one else besides myself," Earle answered, smilingly.

"Earle," cried the lovely girl, turning suddenly upon him, and, with something of her old girlish impulse, laying one white hand on his, "if you won't do as I wish for your *own* sake, won't you for *mine*? and"—the color mounting to her forehead as she made the delicate offer—"until the year expires, won't you please go to Mr. Felton and get whatever you need?"

If Earle was ever impatient and rebellious in his life he was at that moment at the cruel fate that kept him from reaching out and clasping his beautiful beloved in his arms, and telling her all the love of his great heart.

How delicately she had worded her proposition! She had not coarsely offered to give him money from her own income, feeling that his proud spirit would recoil from coming to her, a woman, for help; but she had made Mr. Felton the medium through which all his needs might be supplied until he could establish himself in business.

He ventured to take that small hand and press it gratefully.

"Editha," he said, striving to control the quiver in his tones, "to both of your requests I must repeat the inevitable 'No;' and for the first, I entreat you not to tempt me, for I cannot tell you how hard it is to refuse anything you ask me, and particularly in that way. As for the other there will be no need, I trust, for I have enough for all my present wants, and before that is gone I hope to be in a way to supply all future needs."

Editha sighed, but saw that his decision was unalterable, and so let the matter drop for the time.

They chatted for an hour on various topics, and then Earle rose to take his leave.

She longed to ask him to come again on the morrow to dine, as she had planned, knowing how lonely he would be when everybody else was so gay; but she knew that it would be no pleasure for him to meet Mr. Dalton in his present mood; but she did ask him to call whenever he was at liberty, and she added, with one of her charming smiles:

"Uncle Richard's books are all here; won't you come and avail yourself of them whenever you like?"

He thanked her with a look that made her cheeks hot again; and then she asked him to wait a moment and she would bring him his package. She was gone scarcely three

minutes, and then came back with it in one hand, and the loveliest little bouquet imaginable in the other.

It was composed of stiff holly leaves, with their glossy sheen and bright winter berries, clear and red, and vivid in their contrast. It was as lovely a bit of floral handicraft as Earle had ever seen, and his eyes lighted admiringly as they rested on it.

"It is for you, Earle," Editha said, simply, seeing his look, and handing it to him. "I made it for you this morning, hoping you would come to-day. You will not expect me to wish you a 'merry Christmas;' but," in low, sweet tones, "I will say instead, '*Peace*, good will toward men.'"

Earle was too deeply moved to reply.

He stood looking down upon the glossy red and green, a mist gathering over his eyes in spite of his manhood, and blessing her in his heart for those precious words which told him he had been remembered before he was seen.

She had "made it for him that morning, hoping he would come to-day!"

Her white fingers had put every shining spray in its place, and she had thought of him the while!

Oh, why must he stand there with sealed lips, when he longed to say so much?

She would not mock him with the usual Christmas formula; but what could have been sweeter or more appropriate than the gentle, low-spoken "*Peace*, good will toward men?"

He slipped the package into an inside pocket, never mistrusting that it had been tampered with, nor that its contents had unlocked for Sumner Dalton the door to a mystery which he had long sought to penetrate in vain.

"Thank you," he said, as he buttoned his coat, "for caring for this; it is very precious to me; and some day I will tell you why and show you its contents. This much I will tell you now—had it been lost or destroyed, *my identity* would also have been destroyed."

Editha looked up in surprise, but she asked no question.

His *identity* destroyed! Was it possible that Sumner Dalton's keen eyes could have missed anything of importance within that package?

Editha accompanied him to the door, and parted from him with a simple "good-night," and then went quietly and gravely to her own room. But she had sent him forth full of courage and hope in spite of his present loneliness and unpromising future; and that bunch of holly was the most precious thing that the world held for him that day, the fair giver excepted.

CHAPTER XII

THE ECCENTRIC CLIENT

SEVERAL months passed, and bravely did Earle Wayne battle with the world and fate.

Cheerfully, too; for, although he did not permit himself to see much of Editha, lest his purpose not to speak of love should fail him, yet in his heart he knew that she loved him, and would wait patiently until his conscience would allow him to utter the words that should bind her to him.

This he felt he had no right to do until his name could be cleared from the stain resting upon it, and he had also gained a footing and practice in the world which would warrant his asking the aristocratic Miss Dalton to be his wife. It was hard, up-hill work, however, for notwithstanding he had passed a brilliant examination and been admitted to the bar, yet it seemed as if some unseen force or enemy was at work to press him down and keep him from climbing the ladder of either fame or wealth.

And there was such an enemy!

Sumner Dalton hated him. He hated him for what he had so dishonorably learned regarding him—who and what he was—and for the relationship which he bore to that face which he had seen in his mysterious package.

He hated him for the interest which Editha manifested in him, and also because Richard Forrester had desired him to have a portion of his vast fortune, and the former had dared to oppose and defy him regarding the matter.

He could never brook opposition from any one, and he had always possessed a strange desire to be revenged upon anybody who stood in his way in any form whatever.

It would not do for him to revenge himself directly upon Editha, for she, with all her money, was altogether too important a personage to him; but he knew he could do so indirectly through Earle, and so set himself to work to crush him.

Thus, through his efforts, many a client, who would have gladly availed themselves of the brilliant young lawyer's services, were influenced to go elsewhere, and their fees, which would have been such a help to Earle in these first dark days went to enrich the already overflowing coffers of some more noted and "respectable" practitioner of Blackstone.

But, for all this, he won for himself some practice, in

which he proved himself very successful, and not unfrequently gained the admiration of judge, jury, and spectators by his intelligence, shrewdness, and eloquence.

But a covert sneer always followed every effort.

Brother lawyers shrugged their shoulders and remarked, "what a pity it was that so much talent was not better appreciated, and that the taint upon his name must always mar his life," it was a "pity, too, that so fine a young man otherwise, to all *outward appearance*, could not make a better living; but then people were apt to be shy of employing 'prison-birds,' the old proverb 'set a thief to catch a thief' to the contrary notwithstanding."

It was Sumner Dalton who had set this ball a-rolling, and had kept it in motion until the day came when Earle was obliged to sit from morning till night in his office, and no one came to him for advice or counsel.

He remembered what Editha had told him to do if he had need—go to Mr. Felton and get enough for his wants; but he was too proud to do this—he would be dependent upon no one but himself.

He could have gone and asked that lawyer to give him work, as he had said he would do; but if he had recourse to his offer, Editha would doubtless hear of it, and, thinking him to be in need, would be made unhappy thereby.

Many a time the tempter whispered, when there was scarcely a dollar left in his purse:

"Never mind, in a few months you will have but to reach forth your hand and pluck the golden harvest which Richard Forrester has set apart for you, and all your trials will be at an end."

It needed but Editha's majority and her signature to insure him independence. But he would not yield.

"I will build up my own foundation, or I will not build at all, he would say at such times, with gloomy brow and firmly compressed lips, but with undaunted resolution.

One evening he sat in his office more than usually depressed.

He had not had a single call during the week, and now, as it was beginning to grow dusk, he yielded himself up to the sad thoughts that oppressed him.

It was beginning to storm outside, and as he looked forth into the dismal street, a feeling of desperation and dreariness came over him, such as he had not experienced before.

His office was excessively gloomy, for he did not indulge much in the luxury of gas nowadays, since he had

not the wherewith to pay for it. His purse lay upon the table before him—he had been inspecting its contents and counting his money.

All that remained to him in the world was a two-dollar bill and some small pieces of silver.

"It will keep me just one week longer, not counting in any washing," he muttered; then adding, with a grim smile: "and a lawyer with dirty wristbands and collar is not likely to invite many clients."

Just then a newsboy passed through the corridor, calling his paper.

"I shall be wrecked indeed if I cannot have the daily news," Earle said, bitterly, as he sprang impatiently to his feet.

He picked up a bit of silver, and, going to the door, bought a paper.

Coming back, and, as if reckless of consequences, he lighted the gas, turning on the full blaze, and then seating himself comfortably in one chair and putting his feet in another, he began to read.

Scarcely had he done so when he heard a shuffling step outside in the corridor, and then there came a rap on his door.

Wondering who should seek him at that hour, he arose and opened it.

A short, thin-visaged, wiry man, of about fifty, stood without.

With a little bob of his head, he said, in a voice as thin as his face:

"You're the chap that conducted the Galgren case, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir; will you come in and have a seat?" Earle replied, politely, yet with a slight smile at the way he had addressed him, and wondering what this rather seedy personage could desire of him.

The man entered and sat down with his hat on, eyeing Earle sharply the while.

"Ain't doing much just now?" he said, his sharp eyes wandering from him to his empty table, noticing the purse with its scant contents, and then at the books undisturbed on their shelves.

"No, sir, I have not been very busy this week," Earle quietly replied.

"That Galgren case was a tough one, eh?" the man then remarked, abruptly.

"Rather a knotty problem, that is a fact," replied Earle,

somewhat surprised at the interest the man manifested in a case so long past.

"Would you like another of the same sort, only a thousand times worse?" he asked, with a keen glance.

"I want *work*, sir, let it be of what kind it may; and I am willing to do almost *anything* in an honorable way."

"Well, then, I can give it to you. I've a knot that I want untied that is worse than forty Gordian knots woven into one; and if you can untie it, or even cut it asunder for me, as Alexander did of old, and relieve me of the fix I'm in, I think I can promise you something handsome for your trouble."

"Your statement does not sound very favorable for my being able to do so, but I can try," Earle replied, the look of bitterness and anxiety beginning to fade out of his face, while his eyes lighted with a look of keenness and eagerness at the thought of work.

He sat up in his chair with a movement full of energy, and then added, with a smile:

"Let me take your hat, sir; then show me this wonderful knot of yours, and we'll see what can be done with it."

The man removed his hat, and Earle saw that it was half full of papers, letters, etc., which he turned out upon the table, and then proceeded to unfold the case which he wished the young lawyer to take charge of.

A long conference followed; question after question was put and answered, and every paper looked into and explained, and the clock on the belfry-tower near by struck the hour of midnight before Earle's strange visitor left him, and a handsome retaining fee as well.

This he did not demand, but the man's keen eyes had more than once rested on that empty pocket-book lying upon the table, and he doubtless knew that it would not come amiss.

For the next four months Earle had no need to complain of a lack of work—night and day he toiled, quietly, steadily, persistently, a stern purpose visible in his face, a light in his fine eyes which meant "victory," if such a result was possible.

This case, which indeed proved a most perplexing one, he felt assured would either "make or mar" his whole future; and, if there was any such thing as winning, he was determined to conquer.

It was to come to trial the first of October.

He had had about four months to work it up in, and now, on the last night of September, he sat again alone in his

office, with folded hands and weary brain, but with a smile of satisfaction lighting up his face instead of the weary expression of bitterness which rested there on that dreary night when he received his first visit from the thin-visaged, wiry man.

He was reasonably sure of success, notwithstanding that the opposing counsel was one of the oldest and ablest lawyers in the city, and he was aware that if he gained the case against him he could not fail to be looked upon with respect for the future.

It provided a tedious trial, for a whole week was occupied in hearing the case, and as point after point, cunning and complicated in the extreme, came up in opposition to the prosecution, and was calmly and clearly rebutted and overthrown, it was plainly to be seen that the tide of popular feeling was turning in favor of the young and gifted lawyer, and Earle felt that his weary labor of four months had been well spent, if it gained him even this.

And who shall describe the eloquence that flowed from his lips as, with his whole heart in his work, he stood up before the multitude and made his plea?

It was clear and concise, witty and brilliant—a masterpiece of rhetoric, logic, and conclusive evidence, combined with a thorough knowledge of all the intricacies of the law, and which did not fail to impress every hearer; and, when at last he sat down, cheer after cheer arose, and a perfect storm of applause that would not be stayed testified to the admiration and conviction which he had excited.

It was a proud moment for Earle Wayne, the poor, despised convict, and Sumner Dalton, sitting there, heard all, and ground his teeth in fiercest rage.

He had not known of the case until almost the last, having been again at Newport. But it had got into the papers recently, and Earle's name as counsel for the prosecution had attracted his attention, and he had returned to the city and been present during the last few days of the trial.

Something very like a sob burst from our hero's grateful heart at this acknowledgment of his worth and power, but it was drowned in the din, and, though nearly every eye was fixed upon him, they saw nothing unusual—only a very handsome young man, who looked somewhat pale and worn with hard work and the excitement of the week.

The victory was his; the case was won, for a verdict was rendered in favor of his client, and the men who had hitherto shunned him and curled the lips of scorn and pity for the "poor chap with the stigma resting on his name," now came

forward to shake hands and congratulate him on his victory. His rigid course of study and discipline under Richard Forrester's direction spoke for itself; *he* had been a keen, sharp-witted, successful lawyer, and his pupil bade fair to outstrip even his brilliant achievements.

"Who are you?" abruptly asked the wiry, thin-visaged man, as he grasped Earle's hand in grateful acknowledgment after the court was dismissed.

"I do not think I have changed my identity since I last saw you, sir. I am Earle Wayne," Earle said, with an amused smile.

"Yes, yes; but I tell you you've got blue blood in your veins. A man that can do what you have done is worth knowing, and *I* want to know what stock you came from."

A shadow flitted across Earle's handsome face at these remarks, but it soon passed, and, still smiling, he returned:

"I pretend to no superior attributes; I was a poor boy, without home or friends, until Mr. Forrester took me in and gave me the benefit of his knowledge and instruction. I have been unfortunate also since then, as you very well know, and when you came to me to take charge of this case, I was well-nigh discouraged."

"I knew it—I knew it; but I knew also that the true grit was in you. I saw it in the Galgren case, and I've watched you since. Besides," with a shrewd look up into the handsome face, "I knew hungry dogs always work hardest for a bone, and they seldom fail to get it, too; that's one reason I brought you my case, and I'm proud of the result."

"Thank you, sir," Earle said, laughing at the simile of the hungry dog. "I am glad that your confidence was not misplaced, and I congratulate you upon our success—it gives you a very handsome fortune."

"Yes, yes; a decent bit of property, I'll admit; but how much of it are you going to want?"

Earle colored at his way of putting this question; it seemed to him a trifle surly and ungrateful after his hard work.

"I trust not more than is right, sir; but we will talk of this another time, if you please," he said, with dignity.

The little man chuckled to himself, as, slipping his arm familiarly within Earle's, he drew him one side.

"How much do you want? Remember, it takes a good deal to pay for a *pound of flesh*, and you've lost a good many since I came to you that night four months ago," he persisted.

Earle saw that the man was really kind at heart, and meant well by him in spite of his unprepossessing manner.

"And you must remember, sir, that the reputation of this success is worth considerable to me but I suppose this is a very unbusiness-like way to talk, and if you are in a hurry for me to set my fee, I will do so," and he named a sum which he thought would pay him well for his labor.

The little, thin-visaged, wiry man chuckled again, and clapped Earle upon the shoulder in an approving manner.

"Very moderate and proper for a youngster, only let me whisper a little bit or advice in your ear, albeit I'm no lawyer. When you can find a fat customer, *salt a good slice of him for yourself*, and when a *lean* one comes along, don't cut in quite so deep. How's that for counsel?"

"Very good," Earle said, with a hearty laugh; "but," with a sparkle of mischief in his eye, as it traversed the thin form of his client from top to toe, "I'm in some doubt as to which class you would prefer to belong to."

The little man tapped his pockets significantly, and then shoving a hand into each, drew forth two good-sized rolls of bills and showed them to him.

"Fat, youngster, when I've any dealings with you, though I can tell you I know how to *pinch hard* in the right place;" and his wiry fingers closed over the bills in a way that reminded Earle of miniature boa constrictors.

He was a strange character, and though during the trial things had come out which seemed to make him out a miser, harsh and soulless in all his dealings with men, yet Earle thought there must be a spot of goodness and generosity about him somewhere, for he seemed so appreciative of his services. And the result proved he was right.

"I'll call around and settle to-morrow; I want this thing off my mind; and I reckon you've not found many bones to pick besides this during the last four months," he said at parting.

"No, sir; this gigantic one has occupied all my time and skill."

"Spoiled any teeth?" his client asked, facetiously.

"No, sir; sharpened them; ready for another," Earle responded, in the same strain, to carry out the poor joke.

"You'll do; I would like you for a son; wish I had a daughter—you should marry her;" and the little man, with his characteristic bob of the head, turned and went his way, while Earle, musing upon the events of the day returned to his office, but thinking that if his client happened to have a daughter, he might wish to be excused from a nearer relationship to him, notwithstanding the now plethoric state of his money-bags.

The next morning he received a check for five thousand dollars from the eccentric man, together with an expression of gratitude for his faithful services. And this was the foundation—the “foundation laid with his own hands”—which Earle now began to build upon.

There were no more idle days for him. Work poured in upon him from every side. Success brought countless friends, where before he had not possessed one and he bade fair ere long to fulfill Richard Forrester's prediction concerning him—that he had a brilliant career before him.

CHAPTER XIII

WILL HE BEAR THE TEST

EDITHA knew something of all this, for she read the papers, and at the termination of the trial enough could not be said of the brilliant victory which the young lawyer had achieved.

She was at Newport, but she would gladly have returned to the city with her father to attend the trial had she known of it in season.

But he had merely said he was obliged to go home upon business, which she judged upon his return must have been of an unpleasant nature, since for several days afterward he was morose and in every way disagreeable.

Every one remarked how much more beautiful Miss Dalton was this summer than the preceding one.

Many attributed it to the change in her dress, as she no longer refused to wear colors, and her wardrobe was remarkable for its taste and elegance, while others said her sorrow was wearing away and her spirits were returning.

No one but Editha herself, however, knew the secret of her own beauty—she had loved and was beloved; and, though her hopes might not be crowned for a long while, yet she waited in patience for Earle to speak, having full faith that he would eventually rise superior to every trial, and trample every obstacle beneath his feet.

She and her father were less in sympathy than ever before.

She had dared to displease him again by rejecting Mr. Tressalia's proposals of marriage.

The day following Earle's call upon her—on that very Christmas Day when she had contemplated asking him to

dinner, and making the day so pleasant to him—Mr. Dalton had brought Mr. Tressalia home with him to be their guest, and he had sat in the seat she had destined for Earle, and she had been obliged to exert herself to entertain him instead.

He had also attended a grand reception with them in the evening, and altogether that Christmas was so entirely different from what she had planned it should be, that she was a little inclined to feel almost as much out of patience with the innocent cause of it as with her father.

A few days later Paul Tressalia had asked her to be his wife, and she had been obliged to tell him "No, it could not be."

Mr. Dalton was very angry, but secretly bade the rejected lover hope, assuring him that Editha's affections were not engaged, and he, three months later, taking courage, renewed his proposal, to receive the same answered as before.

A stormy interview between father and daughter had followed, Mr. Dalton declaring that she *should* marry the rich Englishman, and Editha as firmly asserting that she should not do so.

The disappointed lover, however, followed them to Newport, where he continually haunted every scene of pleasure where the fair girl was to be found; and, to Editha's shame, she was at last forced to believe that her father was still bidding him hope against hope.

It might be thought that Paul Tressalia was lacking in either pride for himself or proper respect for the woman he professed to love, by being so persistent but it was the one passion of his life, although he was thirty years of age, and he could not easily yield to her gentle though firm refusal, particularly when Mr. Dalton told him he must eventually overcome her objections if he was patient.

He was not presuming in his attentions; he never forced his society upon her; yet, with a patience and faithfulness that deserved a better return, he waited and hoped.

"If you would but give me the least ray of hope that I may eventually win your love, Miss Editha; my life will be *ruined* without the crown of your love," he had ventured to urge once more, in a sorrowful kind of way, on the last evening of her stay at Newport.

He had heard she was going on the morrow and he could not bear it; he *must* put his fate to the test once more and for the last time.

"Mr. Tressalia," she entreated, in a pained voice, "what *shall* I tell you to make you understand that it cannot be?"

"There could be only *one* thing that you could tell me that would destroy every gleam of hope."

"And that?" she interrupted, with a quick breath and a fluttering of her white lids.

"That your love is given to another," he said, passionately, and searching, with sudden foreboding, the beautiful face he loved so well.

The rich blood surged instantly over cheek brow, and neck.

Could she confess that she loved another, when that love was as yet unspoken even to its object?

And yet she must not go away and leave him to feed on a hopeless passion.

Would it be maidenly? Would it be proper?

"Editha, have I been deceived all this while? Have I been persecuting you with my attentions, while you loved another?" he cried, in consternation, as he marked that startled flush, and intuitively knew its cause.

She looked up into his white, pained face, and pitied him from the depths of her tender heart.

"Mr. Tressalia," she said, with sudden resolution, "it is cruel to allow you to hope when there is no hope. I will make you my confidant. You are noble and good, and you will not betray my trust. What you have said—is true."

Her voice was low, and sweet, and tremulous, as she confessed it, but her face was dyed with hottest blushes.

"You *do* love some one else?" he cried, in a hollow voice, his noble face growing gray and sharp with agony.

"Yes," she whispered "but only the exigency of the case would force me to confess it."

And then she told him frankly all the story of her early regard for Earle Wayne—his misfortune and patient endurance for another's crime—of his return, and of their mutual though unspoken affection for each other.

"Earle Wayne!" he repeated with a start. "Who is he? Where did he come from?" he demanded, with eager interest, as she spoke his name.

"I do not know. He came to my uncle when seventeen years of age. He was fatherless, motherless, and friendless; but he has proved himself, if not honored among men, to be stamped with Heaven's nobility."

Would that Earle Wayne could have heard this tribute from the woman he so loved!

"Wayne—is it spelled with a y?" Mr. Tressalia asked.

"Yes."

"Of what nationality is he?"

"American, I judge, though I never heard him say aught upon the subject."

"Strange! strange!" Mr. Tressalia muttered, with thoughtful brow.

But after a few minutes of musing, he reached out and clasped her hand.

The confession she had made, and he had listened to, was a strange one for a delicate and sensitive woman to make, and his great heart was touched with sympathy for the gallant lover, and with admiration for the woman who could be so true and loyal to him.

"Miss Dalton," he said, in earnest though slightly tremulous tones, "I realize that all my hope must die; but what you have told me only makes my loss so much greater and harder to bear, for I honor you above women for the courage you have manifested in telling me this. You are a noble daughter of a noble country, and he who has won your love will have cause to adore you all his life. That he is worthy of you, notwithstanding his misfortune, I cannot doubt, after what you have told me, and I do not believe you could love *unworthily*. God bless him for his nobility, and you for your constancy!"

Editha looked up astonished at this heartfelt benediction. She had begun to regard him as lacking somewhat in character and pride, when he had returned to plead his cause after her repeated refusal, but now she saw that she had underrated him. She saw that his love was deep and true for her, and that he suffered as great men alone can suffer when he found that he could never win her love; but a mind that was capable of such generosity as to rise above self—to admire and sympathize with a rival—was worthy of the highest regard.

"I am proud," he went on, not noticing her look, "that you have considered me worthy of this confidence; and, if anything could assuage the pain I experience, the trust that you repose in me would do it. Your confidence shall be inviolable, and if there is anything that I can do at any time to promote your happiness and Mr. Wayne's interests, I pray you will not hesitate to let me know it, and I will gladly serve you both."

Paul Tressalia did not realize what he was promising when he said that, but there came a time when he was tried as few men are ever tried; and—did he bear the test? We shall see.

Never in all her life had Editha regretted anything as

she did at this moment that she had been obliged to blight the hopes of this noble, whole-souled man.

The bright drops chased each other over her cheeks as she thanked him for his kindness, and expressed her regret that she had been obliged to cause him pain.

"Do not grieve for me," he said, gently, as almost involuntarily he wiped her tears away with his own handkerchief. "I know I must suffer as few suffer; but, Editha, believe me, I would rather you would be happy in *another's* care and love than *unhappy* in *mine*. God bless you, my love—by one only love, and perhaps He will yet comfort me."

Editha arose and gave him her hand. She could not speak; she could not bear anything more.

It was her "good-night" and "good-by," for the early morning would find her on her way home.

He watched her until the last flutter of her light robe disappeared from view, and then, springing to his feet as if a hot iron were burning his soul, he went out into the night to battle alone with his rebellious heart.

The late mail that evening brought him letters containing important news from and requiring his immediate presence abroad. He left the next day for England, firmly believing, that hereafter should look upon the face of Editha Dalton in this world again.

Mr. Dalton and his daughter returned to their home in the city, and settled down for the winter—Editha cheered and happy to see Earle occasionally and to know of his increasing success.

Without saying anything to any one, on the morning of her twenty-first birthday she repaired to Mr. Felton's office, and with a resolute face and steady hand, signed the papers that gave to Earle Wayne ten thousand dollars, together with a year's interest, even as she had said she would do.

These papers she desired should be taken to him at once, and in case he refused to accept the bequest, Mr. Felton was authorized to safely invest the money and retain the papers in his own possession until they should be called for.

Earle firmly refused to touch a cent of it, saying his business was fast increasing, and he did not need it.

It was therefore taken by Mr. Felton to the First National Bank, deposited in his name, and left to accumulate.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INTERVIEW INTERRUPTED

ONE day Earle was looking over his papers and arranging them more systematically, when he came across a package containing the memoranda and evidence used during that "knotty case" wherein he was so successful.

These had been wrapped in a newspaper, and had remained untouched since that time.

As he was looking them over, and considering whether it would be best to keep them any longer or destroy them, his eye caught sight of a paragraph, or name rather, in the paper that instantly riveted his attention, and, with staring eyes and paling cheek, he read it eagerly through.

Then he turned to look at the date of the paper.

It was the very same that he had bought that night when he had been so forlorn and dreary, when for a week no one had come to him to get him to do even so much as a little copying, when he had counted his money and discovered all he possessed in the world was a little over two dollars.

Then he remembered how recklessly he had gone to the door to purchase the paper, and, returning, had turned on the full blaze of gas to read by, and, before he had read half a dozen lines, his strange client had appeared, and the paper had been entirely forgotten from that time.

Doubtless it would have been destroyed, and he never would have seen this, to him, highly important paragraph had it not been used as a wrapper for the papers which the little, thin-visaged, wiry man had brought him.

"It is hardly six months now since this paper was printed," he said, with a shade of anxiety on his face, as he turned to look at the date again.

Then he sat down to think, evidently deeply troubled and perplexed about something.

Meanwhile the boy brought him in his evening paper, for he could afford to have one regularly now, and mechanically he unfolded it and began to read. He had nearly looked it through, when, under the heading of "Gleanings," he read this:

"It will be remembered by the frequenters of Newport that Mr. Paul Tressalia was suddenly recalled abroad, at the last of the season, by the serious illness of his uncle, the Marquis

of Wycliffe, who has since died, and, being childless, Mr. Tressalia thus becomes heir to his vast possessions in both England and France, and also to his title."

Earle's face was startlingly pale as he read this, while his broad chest rose and fell heavily, as if he found a difficulty in breathing.

"That must be the Paul Tressalia who was here last winter, and—who was so attentive to Editha," he said, with white lips.

For an hour he sat with bent head, deeply-lined brow, and an expression of deep pain and perplexity on his face.

"I must do it," he said at last "and the quicker the better."

He turned to the shipping list and looked to see what steamers sailed soon. He found two that were to sail on the morrow.

"That will do," he said, and laid aside his paper, with an expression of resolution on his face.

Then he arose, locked his safe, donned his coat and hat, and made his way directly to Mr. Dalton's aristocratic mansion on —th street.

He inquired for Editha of the servant who answered his ring, and was immediately shown into the drawing-room, where she sat alone. Her face lighted and flushed with pleasure as she arose to greet him.

"Earle, you are very, *very* much of a stranger," she said, half reproachfully.

"I have been very, *very* busy," he answered, smiling.

"I know—I read of your great success, and the papers speak very creditably of the rising young lawyer, and the friends of that young lawyer would be glad to see more of him. Just think, you have only called once since our return from Newport, and then I had other callers, and only saw you for a few moments, while I have only met you once or twice since on the street."

"It would be very pleasant to come oftener, but you know duty before pleasure and I fear my friends, what few I have, will see even less of me in the future."

"How so?"

"I have business that calls me abroad immediately; it is of that I came to tell you to-night," he said, with a grave face.

"Abroad! Where?" Editha demanded, breathlessly.

"To Europe."

"Will—will you be gone long, Earle?" she asked, all the

light and beautiful color fading out of her face at this intelligence.

"I do not know—no longer than I can possibly help, for I have work of great importance to do here yet," he said, with a sigh, and a note of bitterness in his tone.

Editha knew that he referred to the solving of the mystery of the robbery. She, too, sighed heavily. It was like taking all the joy out of her existence to know of his going away.

While he was in the same city and near, so that she could see him occasionally, or hear of him even indirectly, she could be reasonably content; but, with the ocean dividing them, her heart would be heavy enough.

Earle marked her emotion, and his heart thrilled.

How sweet it was to know that she loved him and would miss him.

He arose from his chair, and going to her, sat down by her side.

"Editha," he said, in low, eager tones, "you will be glad to learn that I think I have at last a clew to that wretched business."

"Earle, is it possible? And is that why you are going away?" she asked, eagerly. "Have you found out who did the deed?"

"No, not quite that; but I have a clew, and I wish I need not go just now; but other business of the most important nature demands it. I had fondly hoped that before many weeks should elapse I should be able to come to you and tell you that no stain rests on my name."

Editha's eyes fell beneath his earnest glance. Well she knew what would follow if he could once tell her that.

"But, of course," he went on, "all my work in that direction will now have to be suspended for awhile. But, Editha," leaning toward her and scanning her drooping face with great earnestness, "is your faith in me as strong as ever?"

"Yes, Earle."

Very sweet and low but firm came the reply.

"And you will still trust me, even though I may be away a long time?"

"*Always*, Earle."

But this with a quick, deep sigh.

He looked at her still, his lips trembling as if he longed to say something, yet hesitated. Then he sat suddenly erect and folded his arms tight across his chest, as if to still the heavy beating of his heart.

"Editha," he began, trying to steady his shaking voice,

"you have told me that you have read of my success, and know that I am winning the esteem and respect of men in spite of the past. I am rising higher on the ladder of prosperity every day, and money flows in rapidly upon me from every side. If my business abroad proves as successful as it has here, I have reason to hope that great good in a worldly point of view is coming to me—just what that is I cannot explain to you now—but under the circumstances I feel that I cannot be silent any longer. I *cannot* go away from you without speaking the words I have so longed to utter—to tell you of the deep and mighty love I have had to chain as with iron bands for a long time. Editha, I have loved you for more than half a dozen years. When I came to you last Christmas, alone and friendless, believing that you also had ceased to remember me, I can never tell you the revulsion of feeling I experienced when you gave me your simple but heartfelt greeting, while there was that in your eyes and manner which told me I might hope that you could love me in return. Your kindness and trust in me were almost more than I could bear at that time. I could have fallen down before you and kissed the hem of your garments, for your divine charity toward one upon whom all others looked with scorn or pity, as if I was afflicted with some deadly and incurable plague. My darling, did I read aright? Did not your yes tell me that day that you could love me if I could come to you with stainless name? Will you give me that assurance now, before I go away? Will you tell me that when I have cleared away that blight from my life—as I *shall clear it yet*—you will be my wife?"

The last word was spoken in an intense whisper, as if it was too sacred to be uttered aloud, while he paused and scarcely breathed as he awaited her reply, his noble face illuminated with an earnest pleading more eloquent than his burning words had been.

We have seen all along that Editha Dalton was possessed of a character remarkable for its veracity and straightforward feeling. She realized now that this was the most serious and sacred moment of her whole life—that upon her reply hung the happiness of her own and Earle's future.

There was no coyness, no hesitation in her answer, though no lack of maidenly delicacy and dignity in her words and manner, as she lifted her flushed face, glorified with the light of her noble, steadfast love for him, and said:

"Earle, if you had told me all this last Christmas-time you need not have lived quite such a lonely, loveless life ever

since. I believe I have loved you from the time when you first came to Uncle Richard's, only I never found it out until the day of your trial."

"Editha, can it be possible?" Earle exclaimed, his face almost transfigured by her words.

"Yes, Earle, I used to wish that you were my *brother* in those days; but when I bade you good-by that afternoon after your trial, it came to me that it was no sisterly feeling that I entertained for you, but something deeper, stronger, and more sacred."

"My darling," he cried, fairly trembling beneath the weight of his great happiness, and yet scarcely able to credit what he heard, "you *would* not say this if you did not *mean* it—you would not allow me to grasp this hope and then let it *fail* me?"

She lifted her clear eyes to his.

"Earle, do you think I could love you all these years and then trifle with the affection which is the most precious gift Heaven ever sent to me?" she asked, with grave sweetness.

"No, no; and yet for the moment my brain almost reeled—it did not seem possible that such joy could be really meant for me, after what I have suffered," he returned, with a deep breath of thankfulness that was almost a sob, as he drew her tenderly into his arms and laid the golden head upon his breast.

"It was cruel, *so* cruel," she murmured, with trembling lips; "I know I shall never be able to realize all you have suffered, Earle, but not a day passed that my heart did not cry out in rebellion against your fate"

"It is all past now, my own; let us not live it over again; and the joy you have given me to-day will brighten all the future," he said, laying his lips reverently against the shining hair that crowned the head upon his breast. "Can it be possible," he added, after a few moments of silence, "that you would have pledged yourself to me last Christmas—to *me* only a few hours out of prison, after serving a *convict's sentence*?"

She laid her hand upon his lips as if to stay the hateful words.

"The fact of your having suffered unjustly for the crime of another only made me love you the more tenderly—I regarded you just as worthy of my affection then as you will ever be," Editha returned, gravely.

"God ever bless you for those words, my darling! And you will be my wife, Editha, some time when——"

"I *will* be your wife, Earle," she interrupted, not allowing him to finish his sentence, for she knew what he was about to add.

"But suppose I should never succeed in finding those rascals who committed the robbery—suppose the doubt must ever rest upon me?" he persisted.

"It will make no difference, Earle. *You* know you are innocent; *I* know it! why then need we make ourselves miserable over what the world may say or think?"

"And you do not care—you will never be troubled or ashamed if others scorn me and give me the cold shoulder?" he asked, astonished.

"Nay, dear," she said, with a smile that had something of sadness in it; "I cannot say that I do not care, for I would like every one to honor you, even as I honor you, and I feel assured that they will yet do so; meanwhile we will be as happy as we can be. *Ashamed* of you I can *never* be—please do not allow such a thought to enter your mind again."

"Editha, you were rightly named. Do you know what it means?"

"No; I never even thought to ask if it had a meaning."

"It means happiness. Who gave it to you?"

"Uncle Richard said that he named me." Editha answered, with a thoughtful, far-away look in her eyes.

"It must have been an inspiration, for I believe you bring happiness to every one with whom you come in contact," Earle said, in tones of intense feeling.

"Then you *are* happy, Earle, in spite of all?" Editha asked, lifting her head and regarding him wistfully.

"My darling—my darling, I cannot tell you how happy; the very best of earth's treasures should be laid at your feet, if I had them, to testify to it, and I trust the day is not far distant when I shall be able to bring you a goodly measure of them," he returned, folding her closer.

"You have brought me the most precious one in all the world to-day, Earle—your dear love," the fair girl answered, softly, and almost awed by the strength and depth of his affection for her.

"Ah! if I did not need to go away!" Earle said, with a sigh.

"I, too, wish that you did not—the time will seem long until you return," Editha returned, regretfully; then she added, suddenly: "Is it absolutely necessary that you should go?"

"Yes; it cannot be avoided. If I were sure of success I

would tell you the nature of the business which calls me abroad; but you can trust me a little longer?"

"Always."

"And would you, some time in the future, be willing to go abroad to live if it was necessary?" Earle asked, with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Anywhere in the world with you, Earle, if need be;" and, with a tender smile, Editha laid both her hands on his.

It was as if she was willing to renounce everything in the world for him and his precious love, and the act touched him as nothing ever had done before.

He bowed his manly head until his lips rested upon them in a fervent, reverent caress.

At that instant the door near which they were sitting swung softly open, and before they were aware of his presence, Mr. Dalton had entered, and was standing before them.

He had come in a few minutes previous, and the waiter had told him that Earle Wayne was there, which intelligence so enraged him that he determined at once to put a stop to all further visits from him.

Whether he had been guilty of listening before entering the room they could not tell, but certain it is that he presented himself before them with a most disagreeable smile upon his face and a glitter in his steel-gray eyes that boded them no good.

CHAPTER XV

A FATHER'S THREAT

"Ah! Mr. *Wayne!*" with a peculiar emphasis upon his name that somehow startled Earle. "Quite an interesting occasion. Pray, Miss Dalton, are you in the *habit* of entertaining your callers in this extremely—ah—*amazing* manner?" he demanded, with a cold sneer.

Editha's fair face flushed with mingled shame and indignation at his coarseness, while Earle's eyes flashed dangerously at his almost insulting manner to his betrothed.

"Papa, Mr. Wayne sails for Europe to-morrow," Editha said, to divert his attention, and hoping thus to tide over a scene until Earle should be out of the way.

"Ah, indeed? I am happy to hear it—extremely happy to hear it," with a satirical bow to Earle, yet with a start of surprise and a searching glance into the young man's face;

"and I presume he was taking a *friendly* leave of you, my dear; quite interesting—quite affecting—ah! quite."

It is impossible to describe the malice and satire contained in his words, or the evil expression on Mr. Dalton's face, as his eyes restlessly searched first one countenance and then the other of the lovers before him.

"No, sir!" Earle replied, rising, and pale to ghastliness with the effort he made at self-control at this insulting language and manner. "I was not taking *leave* of Miss Dalton, and, since I do not approve of concealments or secret engagements, I will state that she has just consented to do me the honor to become my wife at some future time."

The young man stood proudly erect, confronting his enemy, and still holding one of Editha's hands, as he made this bold statement.

"Do *you* dare stand there and tell *me* this?" Mr. Dalton hissed, with strange malignity.

"And why should I not dare, sir?" Earle asked, with forced respect, remembering that he was speaking to Editha's father.

Sumner Dalton did not reply, but, turning fiercely upon Editha, demanded, in a voice of concentrated passion:

"Is what he says truth?"

"Yes, papa," she replied, firmly, but with downcast eyes and painfully flushed cheeks.

"You have promised to *marry him?*" pointing with a shaking finger at Earle, and speaking in the same tone as before.

"Yes, sir."

"You have dared to do this thing without either my knowledge or sanction? *You* marry a thing like *him!*"

The blue eyes were downcast no longer, but flashed up to meet his, with a clear and steady glance.

"Sir!" she began, and her tones, though respectful, were firm and unfaltering, "I was twenty-one years of age some time ago, and I can now, so to speak, act upon my own authority, if I choose. I am, at all events, old enough to know my own mind, and I believe I told you once before that I consider I have a right to judge and act for myself in a matter so vital to my own happiness and interests."

She paused a moment, and her look of independence changed to one of pain, as she added, more gently:

"I would much to prefer to have your consent and approbation in all that I do, but——"

"You will have my curses and hate instead," he interrupted, nearly purple with passion that she should face him so dauntlessly.

"Please do not say that, papa," Editha cried, in deep distress.

"Mr. Dalton," Earle now said gravely, yet feeling as if he could hardly keep his hands off the man for wounding her so, "may I ask *what* your objections are to my union with Miss Dalton?"

"It seems exceedingly strange to me that you should *need* to ask any *respectable* and honorable citizen what his objections would naturally be to *your* marrying his daughter," was the intensely sarcastic reply.

Earle flushed, but still controlled himself.

"I understand you, sir," he said, proudly "but I can assure you that I am guiltless of the deed which you would impute to me. I have even now a clew to the real culprits——"

"You have?" Mr. Dalton interrupted, with a startled look.

"Yes, sir, and though I have suffered a felon's disgrace; yet let them once be brought to justice, and my name will be cleared from every breath of taint."

"*Your name will be cleared from every breath of taint!*"

Mr. Dalton repeated, with an emphasis and look that made Earle start violently and regard him with perplexity.

Then he answered, with firm assurance:

"Yes, sir; I think I can safely promise that in six months from this time I shall be able to convince you that I am as honorable and respectable a man as you yourself claim to be, and shall be able to offer Miss Dalton a position in life that even you will be proud to accept for her."

Mr. Dalton now started as if stung at these last words, and his face would have been a study for a painter.

He had grown very pale while Earle was speaking, and his countenance wore a half-frightened, perplexed expression, while his eyes were fixed upon the young man as if fascinated.

"How can you do this thing? What do you mean?" he at last demanded, in a wondering tone.

"Pardon me if I say I cannot explain just now," he answered, with a slight smile, and a quick, fond glance at Editha, as if *she* would be the first one to be told of any good that came to him; "but, providing that I can thus convince you of my honesty and respectability, will you then consent to my union with Editha?"

"No!" burst from the irate man, who seemed to recover himself at this question.

Earle looked surprised, and as if utterly unable to comprehend the man's strange demeanor, and his peculiar animosity toward him.

"Have you any *other* objection to my making Miss Dalton my wife?" he asked, in his straightforward way.

"Yes, sir, *I have.*"

"May I ask what it is?"

"You may ask, but it does not follow that I shall tell you. Suffice it to say that you shall *never* marry Editha Dalton."

Earle Wayne smiled calmly.

"Pardon me, but that is a question which Editha alone can decide," he replied, respectfully but confidently.

"Aha! do you think so?" sneered Mr. Dalton. Then turning to Editha, with a malicious smile, he demanded: "And what is *your* opinion about the matter, miss?"

"I wish we could be at peace, papa. Oh, why cannot you be reasonable, and let me be happy?" she exclaimed, with gathering tears and a bitter pain at the rupture she foresaw.

"Speak! What do you think of your lover's statement?" reiterated Mr. Dalton, harshly.

"If I must speak—then—I must," she began, with quiet dignity, "although I dislike to cause you either anger or sorrow. I think this is a matter which *I* alone can decide, and—I *have decided.*"

"*How* have you decided?" thundered Mr. Dalton, striding toward her.

"I have decided that if we both do live, I shall be Earle Wayne's wife," she said, with a quiet firmness that left no room for doubt.

A proud, glad light leaped into Earle's face at these brave words, though he would cheerfully have shielded her at almost any cost from this angry scene with her father.

"Aha! you have, have you?" he returned, in tones that made her shrink from him and move nearer Earle, as if for protection from some impending ill, though she knew not what.

Mr. Dalton marked the gesture, and it enraged him still more.

"I suppose you think you love this fine young gentleman very much," he said, with a strange smile upon his lips.

"Yes, sir, I do," she answered, unflinchingly.

"And you, sir?" turning fiercely upon Earle.

He would not have deigned to reply to the trivial question had he not deemed it best for Editha's sake to temporize with him.

"I have loved Miss Dalton since the day Mr. Forrester in-

roduced me to her, more than six years ago," he answered, quietly.

"I can crush you both with a breath—you shall *never* marry each other," Sumner Dalton whispered, hoarsely.

Earle thought this but an idle threat, uttered in the heat of passion, and paid no particular heed to it; but he longed to put an end to the disgraceful scene.

"Mr. Dalton," he said, speaking very calmly, "why will you not listen to reason? Do you not see that there is nothing to be gained by so much passionate opposition? Editha and I are both of age, capable to act for ourselves, and we both also believe that there can be no impediment to our union except, perhaps, the fancied one of a social unfitness; and for that we do not propose to sacrifice the happiness of our lives. I do not desire to be at enmity with you, and I cannot understand why you should be so violent in your dislike of me, since I am not conscious of ever having done you any injury. I do not mean to be unreasonable in my resistance of your will and authority, but your own good sense will tell you that no man would lightly yield the woman he loved as his own life; and, while I believe that every child should obey the divine injunction to 'honor one's parents,' yet there is a limit beyond which this will not apply. Now, if you have any good and sufficient reason for what you assert, I desire to hear it."

Mr. Dalton's eyes had been fixed upon him while he was speaking in that same strange gaze that he had noticed once before, and now, as then, he had grown deadly pale.

"I have a good and sufficient reason, and I would see her on the rack before I would allow *you* to marry her," he said, bending towards him and speaking with a vindictiveness that sent a cold chill creeping over Earle's flesh.

"Oh, papa, what can you mean?" exclaimed Editha, with a shudder.

"I cannot understand this fierce hatred which you seem to entertain for me," began Earle, regarding him thoughtfully.

"You have hit the nail on the head at last. I hate you—I *hate* you—and I have *cause* to hate you," Sumner Dalton answered, shaking like a leaf in the wind, as he uttered the fearful words.

"I repeat, I cannot understand it," Earle said, wonderingly.

"I suppose, practically speaking, you do not even know the meaning of the word," sneered Mr. Dalton.

"I *hope* I do not, sir. We are commanded not to hate,

but rather to love our enemies, and to do good to those who injure us."

"I suppose you put that in practice, since you preach it?"

"I *desire* to practice it most certainly," was the grave response.

"How would it be if you could find those real thieves, for whom you pretend you have suffered disgrace?" was the searching query.

Earle's face was very noble and earnest as he returned, thoughtfully:

"Beyond proving my own innocence, and justifying myself in the yes of the world, I believe I can honestly say I wish them no ill."

"And you would revenge yourself by making them serve a *double sentence*, if you could?" demanded Mr. Dalton, skeptically.

"It might be necessary for the good of the public that they should be put where they could do no more injury; but it would afford me no personal gratification, I can assure you," Earle answered, with a sigh, feeling that it would be but sad pleasure to be the cause of another's serving out a term of weary years in State prison, as he had done.

Then, with a pitying glance at his enemy, he said, even more gently than he had yet spoken:

"Mr. Dalton, did you never read what Milton says of that ignoble sentiment of which you speak?"

'Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.'

Mr. Dalton laughed, mockingly.

"You should have continued your very apt quotation, for, if I remember rightly, a few lines below read like this:

'I reckon not, so it light well aimed—

* * * * *

Spite then with spite is best repaid.'

I must confess that your creed is beyond both my comprehension and inclination; and, mark my words, you yourself will yet prove it fallacious by practical illustration."

"I trust not, sir; the world would be a sad place in which to live if such passion ran riot in the hearts of all men," Earle said, sadly.

"Let an enemy fall into your hands and see; let some one

do you a deadly injury—let him crush your hopes, and every prospect for the fulfillment of your ambitious desires, and bar you forever from the one prize you covet most on earth, and then see if you will preach about love to your enemies,” Mr. Dalton said, with a fierceness that was absolutely startling, and Earle wondered more and more what possible connection all this could have with his hatred of him.

He was not conscious of having crushed any of his hopes, nor of hindering the fulfillment of any ambitious desires, nor of barring him from any coveted prize, although he thought Mr. Dalton was guilty of all this in regard to himself.

“Are *you* not doing that very thing now? Are you not seeking to wrest from me the dearest object which earth holds for me?” he asked, gently, and really pitying one who was so at the mercy of his fierce passions.

“Yes; and aren’t you longing to grapple me with those powerful hands of yours and crush me for it?” he laughed in return.

“Honestly, no, Mr. Dalton,” Earle exclaimed, with solmen earnestness; “I would not avail myself of the slightest advantage to do you an injury. You suffer more from the exercise of your own vindictiveness than I ever can from its effects.”

“And yet you are determined to marry *her*,” with a gesture toward Editha, who now sat with bowed head weeping, “in spite of all my threats?”

“Not ‘in spite of your threats,’ Mr. Dalton, for they do not move me in the least; but because our love and our happiness are both too sacred to be sacrificed to the malice of any one,” Earle replied, with dignity.

“You will not heed me—you are determined to marry Editha?” he demanded, scowling darkly.

“If Miss Dalton consents to be my wife, I shall most certainly make her so.”

“And you will not be warned?”

“What possible cause, sir, can you have for this fierce opposition and resentment? *Will* you tell me?” Earle demanded, nearly wearied out with this controversy.

“No; that is my secret—I shall not tell it to you. *I shall keep it to crush you both with; and crush you it will, if you attempt to thwart me,*” he answered, sternly.

Earle bent his head in deep thought for a moment, then, seeking Mr. Dalton’s eye with a searching look, he said:

“Mr. Dalton, tell me one thing; it is not possible—you do not think that it is Editha’s money I am seeking?”

"It would not be so strange a thing if you were; Editha has a pretty penny of her own; but let me tell you not a dollar of it will you get more than you have already got," he snapped, savagely, and with a scowl at his daughter, as he thus referred to her defiance of him regarding Richard Forrester's legacy to Earle.

"I have never touched that money, sir, nor do I ever intend to do so; and it seems to me as if that fact alone should convince you that I am no fortune-hunter," the young man said, flushing with disgust that such a motive should be imputed to him.

"That is a very pretty theory, and doubtless wins that silly girl's warmest admiration, as being so disinterested and noble in you; when, if you should be so fortunate as to succeed in your designs to marry her, you would have the handling of the whole," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"Sir, if you were any other than Editha's father you would be made to repent of and apologize for those words."

Earle's eyes emitted glances of fire, and his clenched hands and heaving chest showed how hard it was for him to refrain from bestowing the chastisement the evil-minded man so richly merited.

A sardonic grin for a moment distorted Mr. Dalton's features at these words; but, turning to Editha, who at that last insult to her lover had risen and now stood at his side, white and quivering with pain and indignation, he said, in low, concentrated tones:

"Remember, if you dare to defy me in this matter as you did in the other, my secret and my hate shall crush you both."

Then, without another word, he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PARTING

"Oh, Earle, what can he mean? For the first time in my life I am actually afraid of my own father," Editha said, sinking back upon the sofa from which she had so recently arisen, and bursting into nervous weeping.

Earle knelt upon the floor beside her, and, lifting her head to his breast, folded his strong arms around her.

"My darling, I think he is so beside himself with anger at some fancied injury that he scarcely knows what he means

himself. Do not allow his words to distress you, Editha, and time, I feel, will bring everything right," he said, soothingly.

"Papa has changed so during the last two or three years—I cannot understand it at all. He used to pet and indulge me as a child, and only laughed at my whims and fancies, as he termed my childish wilfulness; but, since mamma's and Uncle Richard's death, he has seemed entirely indifferent. He will not bear the least opposition from me upon any subject. We have had more than one controversy regarding you, Earle—I *will* stand up for what I know to be right and honorable, and if it happens to conflict with his ideas, he is so angry. Besides——"

She stopped suddenly, blushing vividly.

"Well, my 'happiness?' Earle said, encouragingly.

"I had occasion to offend him deeply not long ago, and I suppose he cannot recover from his disappointment."

Then she went on to tell him of Mr. Tressalia's proposals, and her repeated rejection of the same.

"I should not feel it right to speak of this to any one else," she said, in conclusion, "for I think it is very wrong for any woman to boast of having given pain in any such way; but henceforth I am to have no secrets from you, and it is but proper that you should know of this."

"I thought perhaps Mr. Tressalia would win you, Editha, at one time, and such *was* the report," Earle said, wondering if she had read of that gentleman's succession to a marquise and great possessions.

But she knew nothing of it as yet, and only nestled nearer to him as she returned:

"Did you hear of that, Earle, and did you believe it?"

"I cannot say that I *really* believed it, for I cherished a little hope myself all the time; and yet I do not know but that it is a wonder he did not carry off my treasure after all," he returned, as he folded her closer.

"No, it is not a wonder; if there had been no *Earle Wayne* in existence, I *might have* learned to love *him*, but there *was* an Earle Wayne in the world, consequently it was an impossibility," Editha answered, with a twinkling little smile in her deep blue eyes.

Earle bent and touched her red lips with fond thanks for the sweet words they had uttered; but there was an expression of thoughtfulness mingled with anxiety on his brow.

"Mr. Tressalia is a noble man, if he is all you represent

him, and it is a sad thing to have all his hopes blighted thus," he said, in tones of regret.

"Yes; I cannot tell you how sorry I was for him, and I hope I may never see such a look on another face as long as I live as I saw on his when I left him that night," Editha replied, her eyes filling with tears at the remembrance.

"Editha," Earle said, suddenly, after a short silence, "*you* do not believe that I care for your fortune—that I give it even a thought?"

"My sensitive Earle, no," she answered, with a skeptical smile.

"Then I am going to propose a bold measure. I dread—I almost fear to go away and leave you. I know you will be unhappy with your father's displeasure constantly following you, and I have a strange presentiment—something tells me that I must not leave you behind. Editha will you marry me and go with me to Europe to-morrow as my wife?"

"Earle!"

She started from his unfolding arms, sitting suddenly erect, her face as white as a snow-flake at the proposition.

"Does the idea startle you so, my own? It is so sudden, I know; but would it not be best for our mutual happiness?"

"And papa—would be left behind entirely alone," she said, thoughtfully.

"Only for a short time, dearest. I shall return as soon as I can arrange my business there to do so, even if I have to go back afterward. Perhaps by that time Mr. Dalton will look at matters in a different light from what he does now," Earle urged.

Editha heaved a long sigh that meant a good many things.

"Earle, I would like it *so* much," she said, sorrowfully, after a long and thoughtful pause, "both the going to Europe, where I have always longed to go, and—being your wife; but——"

His arms clasped her more tightly at that word of doubt.

"Must there be a 'but?'" he whispered.

"I am afraid there must," and her hand went up to his face with a caressing motion. "Perhaps if I stay and wait I may be able to win papa over to our way of thinking. At any rate, I must strive for peace with him. It will not be so very long, will it, Earle?"

"I cannot tell, dear, exactly how long. I may have to be gone six months; I do not think it can possibly take any longer than that to decide my case.

"Six months!" with another sigh and slight quiver of her lips. "I feel that it is best to wait, Earle. I must be patient,

and try to do what is right. Papa may be angry with me, but I cannot think he is wholly devoid of affection for me, and he is so alone in the world, he might miss me."

"It shall be just as you wish or say," Earle replied, but looking disappointed nevertheless. It really seemed to him as if something told him he *must not* leave her behind. "I would rather come to you with my hands full," he added; "and Editha, if I am successful in my business abroad, I feel that even your father, with all his prejudice against me, will be proud to give you to me."

"That settles it, then Earle; we shall wait; for it is better to win than to displease him. But I shall miss you; it is hard to let you go," she said, with a quiver in her voice.

"My darling, do you not think it is hard also for me to go away and leave you—particularly as I fear you are not going to be very happy? And, dearest, for fear that something may happen to our letters, in the *same way that there did your flowers*, I will secure a lock-box at the office for you before I go, and send you the key."

"That will be a good plan," she answered, flushing.

It was hard to feel that her father would be guilty of anything so underhanded as to intercept her letters, but she had discovered, by questioning his servant, that he had intercepted and destroyed her flowers, and the distrust now would naturally arise.

"Every mail, dear," Earle went on, "I shall expect to hear from you, and I will write as often to you. Now, my darling, I must say farewell. I shall not have time to come again, as I have much to do, and the steamer sails to-morrow at noon."

"So soon? Can I let you go so soon?" Editha sighed; then, looking up with an effort to smile, she added: "I ought not to murmur, for, of course, the sooner you go the sooner you will return."

"That is my brave little comforter. I could not bear to leave you sorrowing. Now put your hands in mine and tell me once for all that you love me, then I can go quite content," Earle pleaded; but his lips trembled slightly, nevertheless, as they sought hers in a mute caress, for this parting was not an easy thing for him, strong man though he was.

Editha folded her white hands together and laid them upon his palm.

"I love you, Earle; I never have loved any one but you; and I shall love only you as long as my life shall last," she said, solemnly, her grave, sweet eyes lifted with a beautiful trust to his face.

"Bless you, my 'happiness;' I cannot help calling you that, it is so fitting; those words will ring sweetly in my ears all the long months I am separated from you."

He bent and touched her white forehead with his lips, then, with a long, fond embrace, he bade her farewell and went away.

* * * * *

At half-past eleven the next morning Editha Dalton's carriage might have been seen drawn close to the wharf near where the great steamer which was to bear her lover across the ocean lay panting like a thing of life in mortal agony.

Earle had said he could not come to see her again, but she had resolved to go to see him off instead.

She must look once more into his face, and hear him speak again in the tones that had grown so dear to her.

Her fair face looked forth from the carriage window, her eager eyes anxiously searching the countenance of each newcomer as he hurried toward the boat anxious to secure his state-room and get settled for the voyage.

Perhaps, after all, she thinks, as she looks in vain for the beloved face, she was foolish to come, and will miss him in the throng and confusion.

But her heart longs inexpressibly for one last look, and word, and hand-clasp, and she resolves to linger until the last moment.

But suddenly her face lights and flushes, and a glad, tender gleam beams from her beautiful eyes. She sees a manly form coming with quick, firm tread toward the wharf.

He also is evidently musing upon something pleasant for a smile of rare sweetness curls his handsome lips, and lights his noble face.

All at once he lifts his head, and, as if drawn by some magnetic influence, his eyes meet those of his betrothed, and, with a bound, he is beside her carriage in an instant.

"My darling! I did not expect this," he said, with a warm clasp of her hand, his face all aglow.

"I could not help it, Earle; it was foolish in me, I suppose, after you had once said 'good-by,'" she said, with a lovely color rising in her cheeks.

"A very agreeable kind of foolishness to me, dear; and I shall take it as a good omen for my journey, that I have had such a pleasant surprise," he answered, smiling tenderly down upon that lovely face, with its shining golden crown.

It was the most beautiful thing in all the world to him.

"I was not sure of seeing you, but I thought at least I

should see the vessel that was to take you away from me, and that would be something," she returned, with an answering smile, though it bade fair to be rather a dewy one, judging from the tears in her eyes.

"Do you so dread to have me go, Editha? I *wish* I might have taken you with me," he said, wistfully, as he noted the tears "something unaccountably impresses me that you will not be safe until I have you within my sheltering care."

"I shall not express another regret if it is going to trouble you so; but, Earle, I shall be glad to have *you* safely back again," she returned, leaning toward him with a yearning on her fair face that thrilled him through and through.

"My darling, do you know how very lovely you are?" he asked, with eager fondness, as his eyes lingered upon the sweet picture before him.

She flashed a brilliant glance at him and colored beautifully at this involuntary tribute.

"You should not say such things to me, Earle. You will make me vain," she said, with playful chiding, yet her lips wore a smile of tremulous tenderness, as if she was glad to be lovely in his eyes.

He laughed softly.

"I am to tell you just what I like, my own, all the rest of your life. Do you know it? And I am not in the least afraid of the result of which you speak. Do you know, beloved," dropping his voice and speaking with an intensity that moved her whole being, "that all the world has changed for me since yesterday?"

A quick, luminous glance up into the eyes bent so fondly upon her, a rare, sweet smile and a deepening flush, told him that this change had not touched him alone.

The ringing of a bell now startled them.

"I must not detain you," Editha said, with a sigh and an anxious glance at the steamer, where all was bustle and confusion.

"Not long, I fear. But you will take good care of my 'happiness' for me while I am away?" he returned, tenderly.

"I will do the best that I can, Earle; but how I shall wish the time away. See, I have brought you these, and," with a sly look and smile, "if you can read this mute language, you will know all I would like to tell you and cannot," and she put into his hands an elegant and carefully selected bouquet of flowers.

He took them with fond thanks, and involuntarily laid the bright blossoms, weighted with their fragrance, against his

lips. Then, with a sudden start and a brilliant smile, he said, eagerly:

"Ah! strange I did not think before; but now I can give you something that I purchased this morning, hoping to have time to drop it in the office for you, but did not after all."

He took a little case from his pocket, opened it, and drew forth a lovely ring, set with one large, rare, pure pearl.

"Hold out the finger I want, Editha," he commanded, softly.

And, with downcast eyes and a deeper, richer surging of color, she held out the forefinger of her left hand, while, with a look of reverence and solemn joy, he slipped the ring to its place.

"I am glad that I can put it on myself, instead of sending it, as I thought I must. Do you like it, Editha?" he asked, regarding the shyly downcast face with exceeding tenderness.

"I cannot tell you how much, Earle."

"I am glad. I suppose, however, that a diamond would have been the proper thing, since, being the most precious stone, it perhaps more fitly represents the most precious gift a man can receive; but to me this pure hearted pearl is a more appropriate symbol of the love I have won than the cold glitter of diamonds. My darling, this small hand belongs to me now."

"Yes, Earle, it is all your own," Editha answered, now raising her eyes, which were full of tender tears, to his.

Then, with a movement graceful as it was involuntary, she lifted her hand and touched her lips to the pure, gleaming pearl.

Earle's look spoke volumes as he noted the act, and brought the ever-ready blushes quickly to the fair face again.

Editha smiled, and, to cover her confusion, said, archly: "It is well, is it not, to yield *gracefully* to the bonds that bind one?"

"My love—my love!" Earle answered, with a look of tender affection, "you never can know how precious you are to me. I wish—oh, how I wish I could take you with me; but I must go now."

With no other farewell than one long, long hand-clasp, one fond, lingering glance—for other eyes were upon them—he was gone, mingling with the crowd, and so passed from her sight.

That night, when Sumner Dalton saw the pale gleam of that pure pearl upon Editha's finger, a sinister look crept into

his eyes and curved the corners of his mouth, though he gave no other sign that he had seen it.

"Do they think to defy me thus?" he muttered to himself, when he was alone again. "Let them beware, *both* of them. I will not brook such opposition to my will. If it were not for the very convenient purse of little Miss Independence, I would crush her now, before this thing goes any further. What can the youngster have gone to Europe for? It cannot be that——"

Sumner Dalton seemed to be smitten with some sudden and startling thought that made him grow very pale and troubled.

"No, no," he went on, after thinking awhile, "it is as utterly *impossible* as that the sun should cease to shine."

CHAPTER XVII

EDITHA BESTOWS CHARITY

THE time, for the first week or two after Earle's departure, dragged heavily to Editha, and then, with her usual good sense, she resolved to fill up the months of his absence with work—the very best antidote in the world for all life's weariness and ills. Consequently, she set herself a daily task in music and in perfecting herself in the languages of German and French, and after that time flew as if on magic wings.

Twice every week she wrote to Earle, and twice every week she heard from him. And such letters as they were, too! Full of such deep, strong, abiding devotion as only such men as he are capable of feeling and expressing.

Whether Mr. Dalton suspected the flight and reception of these little white-winged messengers of love was a matter of doubt to Editha. At all events they were none of them intercepted or tampered with, since she alone held the key to lock-box 1,004, and trusted no one else with it.

She wondered often what the nature of Earle's business abroad could be, and what great good he expected it to bring him if he was successful.

She wondered if it was some case connected with the lords and nobles of that country, and by which some American descendant expected to be elevated to the nobility of the land.

She built many a romance and castle in the air, but whether they would stand or fall she could not tell until her lover's

return. He did not mention business matters to her in his letters, and therefore she had no means of knowing whether he was meeting with success or not.

* * * * *

"Please, miss, give me a dime, my father is dying and we've neither fire nor bread."

These were the plaintive words which greeted Editha's ears one cold, threatening evening, as she was hurrying to reach the shelter of her home before the storm should overtake her.

She had been out, as usual, to recite her German and French, and on returning had stopped to do a little shopping, and it had begun to grow dark before she was through.

In passing through a narrow alley to shorten the distance and catch a car, the above words had fallen upon her ears.

No bread, no fire this cold, dismal night, she thought, with a shudder, as a blue, emaciated hand was extended to receive the pittance craved.

Editha involuntarily stopped and turned toward the voice, and found herself face to face with a young girl of about fourteen years of age.

She was tall for her age, and painfully thin, and very scantily clad. A thin and tattered shawl was wrapped around her shoulders, and one end also served for a covering for her head.

Her stockings were nothing but a covering to hide the nakedness of her limbs, while through the gaping shoes, which had never been mates, Editha could plainly see her cold and purple toes.

The sad face was blue and pinched, with such a hungry, appealing look in the large, dark eyes that it went straight to Miss Dalton's heart.

For an instant, as she stood there beside the forlorn little waif, her own rich furs and elegant velvet cloak, with its costly trimmings, brushing that scantily-clad figure, a feeling of shame and self-condemnation rushed over her that so much should be lavished upon herself while one of Christ's poor was in want and suffering so near.

"How cold you look, my poor child! Why don't you go home, instead of staying here in the dismal street?" she asked, pityingly. The girl shivered.

"We haven't got any fire at home. If some one would only give me a dime!" she pleaded.

"No fire on this wretched day?" Editha repeated, sorrowfully.

"No, miss; and father's dying, and mother nearly stupid with the cold, and we haven't had anything to eat to-day."

"Oh!" gasped Editha, horrified.

"I thought, miss, if I could only beg a dime of some one," the girl went on, encouraged by her sympathy, "I could buy a few coals and make father a little gruel—there *is* a handful of meal left."

Her pitying heart prompted her to go at once to ascertain and relieve the necessities of these wretched people; but she knew it was not always safe for a lady to enter those poverty-stricken abodes alone, and particularly so late in the day.

She was not sure either that the girl was telling her the truth, though she undoubtedly was an object of charity, and should not be left to suffer in her thin clothing—and there was no mistaking the look of hunger in her wan face.

Looking up, she espied a policeman not far distant. She beckoned him, and he immediately responded to her summons.

"Do you know much about the people in this street?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; I know that they're a miserable set, mostly," he returned, politely touching his hat.

"Miserable?—how?"

"Why, so poor they can hardly keep soul and body together, while some of them are desperate and vicious."

"This girl tells me that her father is dying, and they have no fire, nor anything to eat. Do you know her?" Editha asked, calling his attention to her companion.

"Oh, this is Milly Loker," he said, recognizing her at once. "Yes, I know her well, and I reckon she's told you the truth, for they've had a hard time of it along back."

"If this is the case I will go home with her and see what I can do to relieve their suffering. I am alone, and it is growing dark, so if you will please have an eye upon this vicinity for the next half-hour or so, I shall be obliged to you," Editha said, as she turned to go with Milly.

"Yes, miss; I'll see that no harm comes to you, and the house is only a few steps from here," he answered respectfully.

"Thank you. And now, my poor child, I will see what I can do for your comfort," Editha said, turning to the girl.

She found her wiping away the great tears with a corner of her shawl, and her heart was deeply touched at the sight.

Without saying anything in reply, she turned and walked toward a miserable-looking tenement-house only a few steps

away. The door hung swinging upon one hinge, making a dismal, creaking noise that sent the chills anew over Editha.

Passing up a flight of dirty, broken stairs, Milly opened another door, which led into a bare and wretched-looking apartment, having only one window, and that broken in several place, the holes being stuffed with rage. Upon a rude bed in one corner lay the wasted form of a man; his hollow and unshaven face making an unsightly spectacle against the not too clean pillow on which it lay.

He was sleeping, and a woman, scarcely less wretched in apperance, sat in a broken chair by his side, her elbows resting upon her knees, and her head bowed upon her hands. A small, cracked stove, upon which there was a broken-nosed tea-kettle, was the only other piece of furniture in the room.

"Mother," whispered Milly, as soon as Editha had entered and she had closed the door, "here is a lady who says she will help us."

The girl passed lightly over the floor and stood by the woman's side, placing one hand on her shoulder to attract her attention.

She lifted her haggard face in a bewildered way, and gazed with a vacant stare first upon her child, then upon Editha.

"Help!" she muttered, her hands working nervously. We'll need help soon, or——"

A shudder finished the sentence more impressively than words could have done, and then, without taking any further notice of her strange visitor, she relapsed into her former indifference and position.

Editha was appalled at what she saw. She had not dreamed of such misery as this, and her face grew white and grave with sorrow and pity. Drawing her purse from her pocket, she took a bill from it with eager, trembling fingers.

"Milly," she said, in a low tone, pressing it into her hand, "go quickly and get something with which to make a fire and something to eat; you know what you need better than I can tell you."

The words were scarcely uttered when the child's thin fingers clutched the money, and with a smothered cry of thankfulness, she was gone like a flash of light.

Editha then turned her attention to the mother. Going to her side, she touched her gently on the shoulder.

"My poor woman," she said, kindly, "how long have you been like this?"

She looked up again, with the same vacant stare as before.

"What?" she said, in hollow tones.

Editha repeated her question.

"We've had no fire for a week, miss," she said, with an effort to arouse herself; "but it hasn't been quite so bad until to-day, for the sun comes in at the window when it's pleasant, and we could sit in that and keep comfortable."

Comfortable!

Editha thought of the cheerful fire in her grate at home, while the house was also heated from attic to cellar with steam, and her heart smote her painfully.

"And have you absolutely *nothing* to eat?" she asked, her eyes filling with tears.

"We have not been entirely without food until to-day; we ate our last penny's-worth of bread yesterday," the woman answered, with a deep-drawn sigh, and, from her manner of speaking, Editha instinctively knew that at some previous time in her life she had known "better days."

"Has your husband been ill long?" she asked, with a glance toward the ghastly sleeper.

"Two or three months; he had a bad fall awhile ago, and lay out in the rain and cold for several hours. The fall strained him, and that, with the cold he took, threw him into a quick consumption. He will live only a few days longer," she concluded, with a sigh. "But how do *you* happen to be here?" she asked a moment after, with a stare of surprise at Editha's rich garments. It had but just come to her that she was entertaining a very unusual guest.

"I met your daughter in the street, and she told me of your suffering; so I came to see what I could do for you," was the gentle answer.

"Poor Milly!" the woman sighed, and then, seeming to be overcome by stupor, fell back into her former position.

She was so weakened by hunger, and cold, and the fatigue of watching, that she was scarcely conscious of Editha's presence, and had answered her questions in a mechanical sort of way.

Ere long a quick, light step sounded on the stairs, and the next moment Milly entered, bearing a basket of coal in one hand, a pail and two or three packages in the other.

"Here, mother, come quick," she said, in an eager whisper; "help me make a fire and warm broth for father. I got it 'round the corner at the oyster-house."

She had deposited her burdens in the middle of the floor, and was down upon her knees before the warped and cracked

stove before she had ceased speaking, nimbly yet quietly laying the kindlings, which in another instant she kindled, and a cheerful roar and crackling sounded through the room, giving promise of warmth and comfort ere long.

"That's the sweetest music we've heard for a month, isn't it mother?" Milly said, in a cheery whisper; and Mrs. Loker, as if aroused by the unaccustomed sound, arose and dragged her weary steps across the floor toward where she sat.

But her strength was exhausted before she reached her, and she sank down beside the stove, helpless and nearly fainting.

Milly, meanwhile, had produced a candle from somewhere, which she lighted and set upon the mantel over the stove.

"Drink a little of this, mother," the child said, springing to her and putting the pail to her blue lips.

The woman eagerly grasped it and swallowed a few mouthfuls of the oyster broth which it contained.

"Poor mother!" Milly said, pityingly. "I know you feel as if the bottom had dropped out of your stomach. I did, and I *couldn't* help nibbling just a little on the way home. Now eat this;" and she broke off a mouthful of soft roll and gently forced it into Mrs. Loker's mouth.

It was the saddest sight that the delicate and daintily-bred Editha Dalton had ever seen in her life; and she could only stand there and weep silently, while she watched that hungry child feeding her starving mother with tender, loving hands.

Do pearls and diamonds never grow heavy with the weight of poverty's tears? Does the rustle of satins and silks never whisper of hunger-moans? Do those rare and ghost-like laces, wrought with the cunning device, and worth their weight in gold, never oppress the hearts of the fair women who wear them?—are they never burdened with the sighs of those whose scant covering scarcely conceals their nakedness, and much less serves as a protection against the chilling blasts of winter, and whom it would take the price of but one single yard of that delicate lace to feed, and warm, and clothe?

Will the gratification of pride, and the wilful extravagance of which these things are the result, afford any satisfaction when, at the last call, the rich and the poor must meet on equal ground, and one shall say: "I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was athirst and ye gave me no drink, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not?"

Something of all this flitted through Editha Dalton's mind as, standing in that wretched room, she witnessed the heart-rending scene already described, and, with a silent prayer that God would strengthen her purpose, she resolved that henceforth her charities should be increased fourfold.

A genial warmth began to pervade the room, a gentle simmering sound came from the pail upon the stove, and an appetizing smell as well.

The woman, gaining strength from the nourishment she had taken, and also feeling cheered and refreshed, arose and assisted her child to prepare something for the husband and father.

The sick man now stirred and coughed feebly, then, becoming aware that something unusual was transpiring, he opened his sunken eyes and looked around.

The first object they rested upon was Editha, who had turned toward him when he moved, and who looked like some fair, beautiful creature from another sphere, as she was standing there with the flickering light falling full upon her face, her golden hair, and rich robes.

The man no sooner saw her than an expression of recognition and fear stole over his features.

"She has come! She has hunted me down at last!" he cried, in hollow tones, and shrinking further down in the bed, but with his eyes still fastened as if by magnetism upon Editha.

"Father," cried Milly, cheerfully, "I'll have something nice for you in a moment."

"No, no; don't let them take me away to jail; I ain't able to go to prison," he moaned, feebly, and trembling as if with fear.

His wife hastened to his side.

"No, John; no one shall disturb you or harm you," she said, soothingly. "His mind is weak, ma'am, when he first wakes," she continued, turning to Editha.

"No, my mind isn't weak," the man replied, impatiently. "I know her, and she's found me out at last;" and, raising his emaciated hand, he pointed with one long, bony finger at their visitor.

"John, be quiet. You do not know the lady; she is a stranger, who came with Milly to help us," returned his wife, trying to quiet him.

"She's found me out at last," he repeated, his eyes still fixed upon Editha. "She's the rich chap's girl, hose house we—Tom Drake and I—cracked three or four years ago. She was asleep when we went into her room and stole

her trinkets; but she looked so beautiful that I've never forgotten her face. I tried to make Tom leave her bracelets and rings, but he wouldn't. It's Miss Dalton, Maria, and I tell you she's come to send me to prison."

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHN LOKER'S CONFESSION

The man had risen on his elbow, and was staring with the most abject fear at Editha, trembling and shivering until his teeth chattered in his head.

His mind evidently was very weak—so weak that, under the influence of the sudden shock caused by seeing the young girl, he was babbling of secrets which otherwise he would never have dared to betray.

His first words had caused Editha only surprise, but as he went on her heart gave a sudden, wild bound that for the moment turned her giddy and faint.

She comprehended at once, when he spoke of having "cracked" her father's house and of taking her "trinkets," that she was in the presence of one who knew something about, and doubtless had participated in, that robbery so long ago, and for which crime Earle had so unjustly suffered. A cry of thankfulness nearly escaped her lips at this almost overwhelming knowledge.

Earle would be free at last—every taint would be obliterated, and he could henceforth walk the earth as proudly as the proudest.

This was the one thought that was uppermost in her mind as she waited almost breathlessly for him to say more.

"You see, miss," his wife here interfered, turning a white, anxious face to her, "he does not know what he is saying, and he is getting very much excited. If—if—I thank you—I *bless* you for your kindness and the comfort you have brought us; but if you will please go away now while I quiet him——"

"No, no, Maria, you shall not send her away!" exclaimed the sick man, growing more excited. "She shall stay now, and I'll tell her all about it, if she'll only promise not to send me to prison."

"No one shall send you there, John," Mrs. Loker tried to say quietly, though Editha could see that she was very much disturbed also.

The opportunity was one that must not be lost, however.

She felt that the man was dying—he could not live many days; and if he knew anything that would clear Earle from dishonor, she must discover it now.

She walked quickly and softly to his bedside, and, speaking very kindly, said:

"Mr. Loker, do not be disturbed. I promise you that no harm shall come to you, and you shall have every comfort as long as you live, if you can prove to me that what you have just stated is true."

Her tones were so gentle, and her eyes so mild and kind, that he was instantly reassured.

He fell back upon his pillow, panting for breath.

"Do you hear, Maria? She says—no harm shall—come. I've dreamed—of her for weeks—as she lay there sleeping—so innocent—and—beautiful—while—we stole her treasures."

"Hush, John, *please*," whispered his wife, greatly distressed.

"No, Maria; I want to tell her all about it now. It is Miss Dalton, isn't it?" and he scanned her face eagerly, as if he feared he might possibly have made a mistake.

"Yes, I am Miss Dalton; and, if you are able, I want you to tell me all about the night of which you speak," Editha answered.

"I'd have been glad to confess it then, rather than let that fine young fellow go to prison," he continued, with a deep sigh; "but Tom declared he'd kill me if I peached, and so I—had to hold my tongue."

He paused for breath, and Mr. Loker, turning beseechingly to Editha, said:

"Miss, I cannot bear him to run on so. Won't you *please* go?"

But Editha was determined she would not. Here she had, in the strangest manner imaginable, stumbled across one of the burglars who had so successfully committed a great robbery and then escaped punishment, while another had paid the penalty; and she was resolved to learn the whole story now, if such a thing was possible.

If the man should die without confessing the guilt that seemed to lie so heavy on his conscience, all possibility of clearing Earle from suspicion and restoring his fair fame would be forever lost.

She disliked to give the suffering woman pain, but Earle's character was dearer to her than aught else, and it would be a cruel wrong to him to heed her request and go.

The man was evidently anxious to confess his guilt; it lay heavy on his heart. He doubtless knew he could not live long, and he desired to make a clean breast of everything before he should die.

No, she must stay and learn what she could; but first she felt that the sufferer ought to have some nourishment; he was already much exhausted from his recent excitement, and his strength would not hold out unless he could first have something to eat.

Editha went to Milly and assisted her to prepare the broth, which was already warm, and the child then, with grateful thanks, took it to him and fed him with her own hands.

He eagerly took all she gave him, as if he also was nearly famished, and then seized the soft roll which she had in her hand, eating it with evident relish.

His hunger satisfied, he beckoned Editha again to his side.

"How came you here to-night, Miss Dalton?" he asked.

She explained how it had happened, and he muttered, half to himself:

"Yes, yes, I see; you were sent here that justice might at last be done."

"John," pleaded his wife anxiously, "you are not strong enough to talk any more."

She shrank from the disgraceful confession she saw he had determined to make.

"Maria, you keep still," he returned, with some show of impatience; "you know how heavy this thing has lain on my conscience ever since that youngster went to prison in my stead; and now that fate has opened a way, I am going to make it right, or as right as I can, if I die the next minute. Miss Dalton cannot stand," he added, with considerable thoughtfulness; "let her have your chair, and you sit on the bed."

In obedience to his request, Mrs. Loker arose from the chair, but, instead of sitting upon the bed, she sank down upon the floor beside it and buried her face in the clothes with a groan.

Editha gladly took the seat thus vacated for her, for she, too, was weak and trembling with excitement.

"I suppose you see that I cannot live long," John Loker said to her; and holding up his thin hand between his eyes and the light, it looked almost transparent.

"You look very ill, sir," she answered, gently.

"What's become of that young chap who was sentenced for that robbery?" he demanded, abruptly, after a moment.

"He is in Europe now."

"He had true grit in him; he never winced nor showed the white feather once during the trial," he said, in an admiring tone.

"How do you know?" Editha asked, in surprise.

Tom Drake and I sat by and heard the whole thing through."

"You did?" she cried out in pain. "How could you?"

Only to think of it—the real criminals so near to justice and Earle convicted instead! It was horrible!

"Yes, we heard the case clear through; we heard the sentence passed upon him; and he stood up so proud, and calm, and handsome, and bore it without a whimper."

"How could you?" Editha again asked, reproachfully.

"I don't know, Miss Dalton, but folks get hardened to almost anything nowadays," he replied, sighing. "It was cheeky, risky business for us to sit there, with some of those very diamonds and trinkets hidden away on our persons, and let another man be tried for what we had done."

Editha shuddered.

"I must confess," he went on, "that I never felt so mean in all my life as when I saw him turn white about the mouth when the jury brought in their verdict; and then, when you jumped up so brave and eager, and declared he *was not guilty*, I was so near confessing the whole thing that Tom laid a heavy hand on me and told me, with a look in his eye that meant business, that he'd kill me on the spot if I made so much as a sign. Of course, I did not dare to move after that," he went on, with a deprecating look into the fair girl's reproachful eyes.

"But there is such a thing as turning State's evidence. Couldn't you have done that, and then, if this other one was more guilty than you, he would have suffered the penalty, and you would have gone free?" Editha asked eagerly.

"I thought of that, miss, and I know Tom suspected me, too, for he dogged me all the time; and then, I'd been entangled in so many other things, I should probably have got deeper into the mire. We reasoned that they would be easy with the young chap—he'd only have a short sentence—when, if they'd caught us, we'd have had ten or fifteen years for being old hands at the business."

"It was a wicked, cruel thing to do, to let an innocent man suffer as he suffered!" Editha exclaimed, forgetting for a moment, in her indignation, that she was speaking to a dying man.

"I know it—I see it now, miss, and I've been afraid to

die with that on my mind; perhaps, if I confess the whole, I shall feel easier. I'll tell you the whole story, if you like," he returned, humbly.

"Yes, do," she cried, eagerly. "It can do no harm to confess it now, and will be an act of justice to the innocent—it will clear Mr. Wayne from the disgrace that otherwise must always rest upon him."

"Wayne! Yes, that was his name. What was the other? It was a sort of high-sounding one, if I remember right," he asked.

"Earle Wayne was the name," Editha replied, with a rising flush as she pronounced it.

Whether it was "high-sounding" or not, it was the dearest name in all the world to her, and she could not speak it without a thrill.

"He was a particular friend o' yours, wan't he?" he inquired, with a quick, searching look into the glowing face.

"Yes; but I'm ready to hear your story now."

She did not deem it at all necessary to enter into the particulars of her relationship with Earle for his benefit.

"Well, as you say, it can do no harm to confess it now, and Tom Drake can't hurt me, either—nobody will dare touch a dying man, though he did swear he'd kill me if I ever lisped a word of it. I know he meant what he said; and, miss, though I've been *driven* to stealing for a living, yet I've always *loved* my wife and child."

He paused abruptly and glanced at those two faithful ones—the *only* ones in all the world who cared that he was dying, and who would miss him when he was dead.

"It's been torture to me lately," he went on, with emotion, "to see them going cold and hungry, taking the bread from their own mouths to keep life a little longer in my worthless body; but, miss, folks that are down in the world and driven into a corner can *love* just as strong as those who never knew a want."

"Indeed, I do not doubt it," Editha said, feeling a deep pity for him, notwithstanding he had so deeply injured one whom *she* so fondly loved.

"I know it is but adding insult to injury; but, miss, if you—if I could only be assured they need not want for bread when I am gone, it would be a great comfort," he added, with a wistfulness that brought the tears to her eyes.

"They shall not—I promise you that I will see that they do not suffer," she said, heartily.

"I do not deserve it from you, Miss Dalton, after using *him* so," she said.

He seemed to have an intuitive idea of how matters stood between her and Earle, and her kindness moved him deeply; and Editha just then heard a smothered sob from the woman kneeling beside the bed.

"Have you a pencil and a piece of paper about you?" John Loker asked, after resting a few moments. "I want you to write down what I am going to tell you, and then I will sign it. It will be a strange 'last will and testament,'" he added, with a bitter smile; "but perhaps it will do as much good as if I left a large fortune."

Editha thought it would, too.

Yes, she had a pencil, and there was some paper in her French book that she had taken to write an exercise on and had not used. She produced these, and, using her books for a table, she was ready to write down the confession that would secure to her betrothed an unspotted name and place him where no man's scorn would dare assail him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

"I'LL give you a description of Tom Drake first, so you will not fail to know him if you should ever see him," John Loker said, when Editha motioned him to begin.

"He's a scamp, if there ever was one abroad in the world, and it would be a good thing for the public if he should yet have to serve a term of years somewhere.

"He is a tall, broad-shouldered, burly-looking man, with an ugly face on him, square, heavy jaws, and fierce black eyes.

"His hair is red, too—something you don't often see with black eyes. There is a piece gone, too, from the lobe of his left ear, where he was once shot by a policeman, and came near losing his life. He has a scar under his right eye, and the little finger on his left hand is missing; that was done in blowing open a safe at one time."

Editha did not think she could fail to know him after this description, and she already felt a sort of creeping horror in her veins as in her mind's eye she saw this dreadful man.

"Well, miss," the invalid continued, "about that robbery; we'd planned to do the thing—or, rather, he'd planned it all, and I was to help do the dirty work, a long, long time before

we found a chance to carry it out. We'd got all the bearings, and knew just how every room in the house lay before we ever entered it.

"On that night—it was cloudy and dark, if you remember—Tom cut out a pane of glass from one of the area windows with a diamond he has on purpose, while I watched to see that no one was around.

"We then easily entered by that window, and made as short work as possible of clearing out everything of value that we could lay our hands on in the house.

"It was about the neatest and most profitable job that was ever done in a private house, and not a soul awoke through it all.

"There were the silver spoons and gold-lined salt-cellar, and a lot of other stuff in the china closet out of the dining-room, all clean, solid silver, too. We cracked the safe in the library, and, though we did not get much money, we got a lot of diamonds belonging to your mother, miss, like enough, and then we went upstairs to see what we could find there.

"I didn't much mind taking the things we found below; I'd got hardened to stealing a good while before that; but when we came to your room where you lay asleep, looking so innocent and pretty, with all that soft stuff ruffled round your neck and wrists, my heart failed me, for I thought of Milly here, whom I suppose I love just as well as rich folks love their children, and I knew just how she'd have loved all the pretty things we saw laying about you. I begged Tom to leave your rings and trinkets, and knick-knacks, but he growled at my nonsense and grabbed everything he could lay his hands upon, holding the lantern and revolver all the while.

"Once I thought what should I do if you awoke and found us there. And, miss, I'd have shot him, bad as I was myself, and about as much to blame for that dirty business, before I would have let him lay so much as a finger upon you."

The sick man was here seized with a violent fit of coughing, which so exhausted him that it was some time before he could resume his confession again.

Editha beckoned Milly to bring him some more of the warm broth, which she did, and this appearing to revive him, he was soon able to go on.

"Have you got all I have told you written down?" he asked, glancing at the paper in her lap.

"Yes, everything," Editha answered.

She had had ample time to do so, for he was obliged to stop every little while to rest and recover his breath.

"That is right," he said; "don't leave out anything, for I must make a clean breast of it all, now that I have begun; and, miss, if the thing can be done, I want that handsome young chap—and he's a lawyer, I hear—to bring Tom Drake to justice, for a bigger rascal does not walk the earth. Why, miss, if you will believe me, he pocketed all the swag, and I never got so much as a penny's worth of it for my share in that night's job.

"But I thought you told me that you wore it concealed upon your person at the time of Mr. Wayne's trial?" Editha said, regarding him in surprise, and thinking his statements did not correspond very well.

"And so we did, miss—the diamonds—we didn't dare hide them with the other stuff, for fear they might happen to be found, and so they were sewed into the lining of our vests; but after awhile Tom said he'd found a chance to send them off and turn them into money, and took those I had away from me. I've never seen anything of them since—he never would tell me whether he had sold them or not, and I've never had a dollar for my share in that job. I was raving mad over it, until I had that fall, and then since I've been sick and had a chance to think it all over, I've been glad that I didn't get anything."

The invalid was here interrupted by another coughing turn, and, while Editha was waiting for it to pass, she happened to cast her eye toward the window back of the bed, and there a sight greeted her that seemed to stop the beating of her heart, and freeze the blood in her veins, and a numbness seized her limbs, rendering her powerless to move for the time being. It was the face of a man—and *such* a face!—pressed close against the pane, and his ear—*an ear with part of the lobe gone*—covering a small hole in the glass.

He was a "burly-looking man," with an "ugly face" on him, "heavy jaws," and "fierce," restless "black eyes."

His hair, too, was red, and—there could be but one person in the world answering to that description.

In an instant—in that one flash of her eyes, Editha had recognized Tom Drake, the burglar and midnight robber!

How long had he been there? How much had he heard, and did he recognize her as John Loker had done? were the thoughts that flashed through her brain during that brief moment that her quick, startled glance rested upon that appalling sight. Her first impulse was to cry out with fright,

but with an effort she controlled it, and glanced hastily at the other occupant of her room, to see whether they were in any danger of also discovering the presence of the listener.

She was glad to find that she alone was conscious of it.

Milly, overcome by the genial warmth after her exposure to the cold, and also by the effective quietus of a full stomach, had fallen asleep by the stove, her head resting against the side of the house, while Mrs. Loker still kept her motionless position by the bedside, her head buried in the clothes; whether she also was asleep or not, Editha could not tell, but she earnestly hoped she was, for she feared, she knew not what, if the man at the window should become aware that his presence was discovered.

The window was at the head of the bed; so, of course, the invalid was wholly unconscious of, and in no danger of knowing, that he had another listener to his confession. The man himself, Editha thought, had not seen her glance that way, for his ear had been laid against the hole in the glass, and he appeared to be listening intently.

After the first excess of fright had passed the stagnated blood rushed through her veins in a swift torrent, sending sharp, tingling pains throughout her whole body, until it seemed as if she was literally swathed in nettles.

But she gave no outward sign. Her thoughts flew to Earle, her manly lover across the sea.

She held in her hands the evidence which, a little more complete, and signed by the man before her, would vindicate his honor and restore him the respect and confidence of all who knew him.

So she resolved to sit quietly there until this was accomplished, though she wondered if her weak and trembling fingers would be able to hold the pencil and trace the words that yet remained to be spoken.

She did not even dare to consider how she was to get home in the fast gathering gloom with that precious paper in her possession; she did not dare to think whether that dreadful creature outside would allow her to leave that place and carry with her the evidence that would serve to doom him to a felon's cell for a long and tedious term of years.

She only found herself wondering how he had attained his position at that window, for she knew they were in the second story of the building, and it seemed a marvel to her that he should be there at all.

Had he seen and recognized her while she was talking

with Milly outside, and then, fearing what would follow, obtained a ladder and climbed to the window?

It was a puzzle to her, but she did not know of the low building attached to the house, and which rendered it very easy for any one to climb and look in upon that poverty-stricken family within.

Neither could she know that it had of late been a custom with that wicked man to go there every few nights to see how fast the only person in the world who knew his dread secrets was dying.

Tom Drake longed to be rid of the accomplice who knew so much of his evil course, and whom he constantly feared would turn against him.

He had heard that day that John Loker was dying, and, determined to see for himself how near he was to his end, he had, as soon as the darkness favored him, climbed to his usual post.

His consternation can be better imagined than described as he beheld and recognized Editha Dalton, of all persons in the world the last one he expected to find there, sitting by the dying man's bedside, writing the confession that branded him the thief and robber that he was.

And Editha, notwithstanding that every nerve in her body was vibrating with pain from her startling discovery still sat there, apparently calm and unmoved, waiting to hear the rest.

She even turned in her chair a little at last, as if carelessly changing her position.

But it was done with a purpose.

She was afraid if she sat directly opposite that window the magnetism and fascination, horrible though it was, of that terrible face and those fierce eyes, which affected her as face and eyes had never done before, would irresistibly draw her glance in that direction and betray her knowledge of the presence there.

"Well, miss," the sick man resumed at length—and the sound of his voice breaking the silence that had been so fraught with horror to her sent a painful shock through her whole being—"we got out of the house with our booty, which we carried in a bag, without disturbing any one, and we were congratulating ourselves that we had done a wonderful, neat and profitable job, when, just as we came around the corner by the front entrance, a young chap pounced out upon us and felled Tom to the ground with a swinging, unexpected blow.

"He then came for me as brave as a young giant, and I

grappled with him. He gave me a tough struggle of it, I can tell you; but, I knew the boxing game better than he, and it wasn't long before I had him laid out as flat as a flounder.

"I did it just in the nick of time, too, for a 'cop' having got wind that something wrong was up, came running down the street; so I just dropped a bracelet, which Tom had made me stuff in my pocket, down beside the fallen hero, to turn the scent upon him, and took to my heels.

"Tom served me a mean trick, though," the man went on, with a scowl, "for he had only been slightly stunned by his fall, and while I was fighting with the young chap, instead of coming to my help, he picked up the bag, cleared out and hid it, and it was only a piece of good luck that I got off at all. He said afterwards he thought I was able to take care of myself, and he was afraid if he did not slip off with the booty the noise of the rumpus would bring a cop along, and we'd lose it all. But he'd got it hid before I found him, and I never saw anything of it afterward, excepting the diamonds.

"I coaxed, begged and threatened, but he kept putting me off with excuses; and, of course, I'd been with him so much in his dirty work that he knew I would not dare turn against him, for I should only get as deep into the mire as he would.

"As long as I was well, and able to help him in his plots, I managed to squeezed enough out of him to keep us tolerably comfortable; but after I got sick we all began to suffer.

"Miss Dalton," the man said, excitedly, "Tom Drake is a rich man; he's got money and swag enough hid up to keep a dozen families handsome all their lives. Why, those diamonds o' your mother's were a fortune in themselves, and we've been starving and freezing here for the last two months; *he's known it, too*, and wouldn't give us a dime to buy a loaf of bread with.

"But I am dying now; *he* can't harm me, and the *law* can't touch me, and I've outwitted him at last; his meanness is half that's made me want to show him up, and if you will only bring him to justice, you'll do the world a favor, besides clearing that fine young chap, who was as brave as a lion, from disgrace; for I tell you Tom Drake is one of the worst robbers in the United States."

He paused, and Editha thought he had got through. She hoped he had, for she felt she could not sit there much longer; it was as much as she could do to keep in her chair and feel that that fearful face, with those fierce, restless black eyes, was looking down upon her, watching her every movement.

But the invalid resumed, after resting a moment:

"We, Tom and me, went to court every day while the youngster was being tried for the robbery we had committed; and we thought it fine fun that the scent had been so completely turned from us to him. It was as clear a case of circumstantial evidence as I ever heard of, and many's the joke we've cracked at that poor fellow's expense. But, miss, I must confess I've had mighty uncomfortable dreams over it since lying here sick, and thinking of him locked in behind those bolts and bars for three long years, and he as innocent as a baby all the time, and we abroad doing more of the devil's work."

He really appeared deeply moved, and Editha knew that he must have suffered on account of it.

"I've been a bad man," he continued with a sigh of regret, "and I suppose I'll get my deserts where I'm going; but I know I shall deserve it all, whatever it may be.

"Have you written everything just as I've told you?" he asked again, anxiously, turning his sunken eyes upon the closely-written sheets in her lap.

"Yes; I have everything correct, I think," Editha answered, longing to know if that dreadful face was still glaring upon them, yet not daring to look.

"Then give me the pencil and hold the paper while I sign it. I want this business off my mind; then perhaps I'll feel easier," he said, eagerly, and holding out his thin hand for the pencil.

Editha placed it between his fingers, and then holding her books with the paper laid on them so that he could write, he laboriously scrawled beneath what she had already written:

"I swear that this is the living truth. JOHN LOKER."

"Thank you," Editha said, with a breath of relief, hastily folding the paper, and wondering where and how she should hide it from those fierce, restless eyes above her.

She ventured to flash one swift glance out of the corners of her eyes toward the window, and, to her intense relief, she found that there was nothing there.

Tom Drake had disappeared as silently and as suddenly as he had come.

But her heart instinctively told her that that was not the last of him.

Perhaps he was even now hiding somewhere near, waiting to pounce upon her when she should go out of that wretched place, and wrest that precious confession from her.

But he should not have it—he *must not* have it; she would make a bold fight, frail woman though she was, before she would yield up the only thing in the world that would clear her betrothed lover's name from dishonor.

She had one hope, else her courage would have failed her utterly—the policeman whom she had asked to have a care for her safety and who had been so civil to her.

But she had been gone much longer than she had told him she would be, and possibly he had become tired of waiting for her and gone away.

A tumult of thoughts like these filled her mind and nearly bewildered her, but above and over all was a stern determination never to part with that paper until all the world should know of its contents.

Convinced that the face no longer glared upon her, she slipped it within her bosom and buttoned her dress close over it. Then she arose to go.

Yes, she could not bear to leave that dying man, perhaps never to see him alive again, without a few comforting words. His own last words had told her that he feared the future—that he dreaded to go forth into the great and mysterious eternity, and she longed to give him a little cheer, even though she knew that every moment's delay but increased her own danger.

"I must leave you now," she said, gently, and bending nearer to him, a great pity shining in her lovely face; "and I thank you more than I can tell you for the act of justice that you have at last done."

"I thank *you*, miss," he said, feebly, and with quivering lips, "for being so kind and gentle to me, and I hope you'll forgive me as well for my share in that night's business," he concluded, humbly.

Could she forgive it?

Editha's heart gave a little startled leap at the humble request. She could readily forgive the robbery, and the loss of so much that was valuable; but could she forgive the wrong done to Earle? Could she ever overlook those long, weary days of suffering which he had borne—the scorn, insult, and abuse heaped upon him, and the disgrace which had followed him ever since?

But he was to be free from it all at last. To be sure, those years could not be given back to him, but all other fetters were to drop from him. She held the key that was to unlock them, and John Loker, the man now asking so meekly for pardon, had given it to her.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

The divine words came to her like a message of light

"Yes, I do forgive you," she said, sweetly; "and God will forgive you even more freely, and take away all the dread you have of the future, if you ask Him."

"Thank you *again*, miss; those are *good* words," he said, with a sigh of relief and thankfulness that she had forgiven him.

"And cannot you believe them," she asked—"that God will forgive you, too?"

He shook his head wearily.

"My mother used to teach me about God when I was a boy, but I've forgotten Him, and been bad for so long, that I guess I ain't of much account to Him now."

The pathos with which he said it, and the look of stony despair in his eyes, made Editha's heart ache for him.

"Do you not regret that your life has been so full of wrong, and such a failure?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed, miss," he replied, earnestly; "I'm bitter sorry, and I've thought it all over and over again the long nights I've had to lie awake here with the cough, but I couldn't see any way out of it."

"*Jesus* is the way, the truth, and the light," came involuntarily from Editha's lips.

"Yes, I've heard that more times than I can count, but I can't understand it, some way," he said, with a perplexed look.

Editha sighed.

What could she say to comfort him? And the thought came to her that, after all, she would rather be in Earle's place, who had patiently and innocently suffered a great wrong, even though the cloud which now overshadowed him should never be dissipated until that day when all things shall be revealed, than to be lying here like this guilty one, upon the borders of eternity, with no hope beyond, even though his life of sin had escaped all worldly chastisement.

"If you were in some dark and dangerous place," she said again, and speaking very slowly and earnestly, "and I should tell you to take my hand, for I knew the way, and would lead you safely out, would you refuse to do as I asked you?"

"Truth, no, miss; and you would not have to ask me more than once, either. But the future is mighty dark to me, and *you* can't lead me through *that*."

"No; but the Friend of sinners can."

"*Friend* of sinners!" he repeated, feebly. "That sounds pleasant."

"That is just what Jesus Christ is," Editha answered, eagerly. "Put your hand in His; it is always held out to all who *need* help; and He will lead you safely out of all danger."

Another deep-drawn sigh was all the reply she received to this; and, after waiting a moment, she said again:

"I must not stay longer now, but I will come and see you again soon."

"You'll not find me here, miss, I fear," he said, with a wistful look at her, as if to see her again would do him good; but *they'll* be here, and you have said you'll be good to them," indicating by a glance his wife and child, who were both now heavily sleeping.

"Yes; I will see that they are made comfortable, and I will leave this, so that if you need anything you can send Milly for it."

Editha put a five-dollar note in his wasted hand as she spoke, and then, with a kind good-night to him, she aroused his wife, after which she went away alone into the dark and dismal night.

CHAPTER XX

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

It was quite dark in the street, she found, when she had groped her way down the rickety stairs to it, and a fine, chill rain was falling.

With a wildly beating heart, and dilating, frightened eyes, Editha looked up and down the sidewalk, hoping to catch sight of the friendly policeman again. But he was nowhere to be seen, and there were very few people to be either seen or heard, every one who was fortunate enough to have a shelter having sought its protection against the storm.

Drawing her cloak closer about her, and calling all her resolution to her aid, she sped her way, half expecting that at every step some horrible creature would rise up and confront her, demanding the precious treasure that lay so close above her fluttering heart. But no such person was in sight, and no one appeared to be following her; and, gaining courage from the fact, she grew more calm, and began to breathe more freely, as she almost flew over the way.

She had nearly gained a more public street, where she

could see the friendly lights glimmering and beckoning her on, and where, once reached, she intended taking a car home.

Her courage arose with every step; she had only one more low, ill-looking building to pass, then an open space, before she would be where no possible harm could come to her. Her heart beat lightly and cried out within her: "Victory! victory!" for now Earle would be free from all taint or suspicion—he could hereafter proudly face the whole world, and no one would dare to point the finger of scorn at him again.

How happy she would be to be able to give him this evidence when he should return. She had never dared to think that *she* would be the one to bestow upon him such exceeding joy, and she hugged to her bosom with a strange feeling of exultation the closely-penciled paper that was to accomplish all this.

The low building was nearly passed—two minutes more and she would be——

Safe! she would have added; but a sudden shock prevented her ever finishing the interrupted thought.

A heavy hand dropped upon her shoulder like the stroke of a hammer, and a fierce voice whispered in her ear:

"Make no noise and I will do you no harm; scream *once*, and I'll choke you; but I must have that paper that John Loker signed for you."

She knew the instant she felt the touch of that hand—before even a word was uttered—*who* it was that had captured her there in the darkness and rain.

She did not need the aid of a light to know that a burly head, with flaming red hair, and an ugly face, with a scar under the right eye, and an ear with part of the lobe gone, towered above her; she could almost *feel* that the hand lying so heavily upon her was minus a portion of the little finger, and a shudder ran through her as it flashed upon her how much of crime that hand was guilty of, and might be stained even more deeply, yet, before it should be removed from her.

The sudden shock seemed to paralyze her for the moment, so that she was powerless to resist. She *could* not have cried out, even if his threat had not intimidated her, so terrible was the fright she sustained.

"I will do you no injury, Editha Dalton; but I must have that paper; and be quick about it, too," the man repeated, in low tones.

Give up that precious paper voluntarily—that treasure worth more to her than her whole fortune! Give up all

the evidence there was in the world that Earle Wayne was an innocent, injured, and long-suffering man!

Never!

Her whole soul arose at once to arms to do valiant battle for the noble lover and his honor.

She had been fearful and trembling all the way from John Loker's house to this spot, dreading every step lest she should meet this very foe.

Now that the danger was encountered, and she, a frail, delicate girl, was actually in the power of a desperate villain, and not a person within hearing to help her, she grew suddenly calm, her brain clear, and quick, and keen to think, her nerves steady to act.

"How do you know that I have any paper signed by John Loker?" she quietly demanded,

She knew well enough how, but she asked the question to gain time.

The man laughed a short, scornful laugh; then he said:

"You are a brave little woman, and a good actress;" and there was a note of admiration in his voice as he spoke. "You thought I did not see you glance up at the window back of John Loker's bed half an hour ago," he went on, in quick, low tones; "you did not scream nor make any fuss, as most women would have done on seeing a face like mine peering in upon them; you knew it was your only chance to get the evidence that would clear an innocent man from the suspicion of a crime; you showed a plucky spirit, Miss Dalton, to sit there and write so quietly, when you knew Tom Drake's ugly face was looking down upon you. But did you think I would let you get away with that evidence? Not much—my business is too profitable to be stopped by having my likeness displayed to the world, even though it was taken by a hand as pretty as yours. So make haste and pass it over," he said, not unkindly, for her dauntless spirit had really inspired him with admiration for her.

"*You cannot have it!*" Edith said, firmly, while she made an effort to free herself from the grasp of her captor.

The next instant she would have screamed for help in spite of his threat, but he, anticipating this, threw one powerful arm around her slight form, placing his other hand at the same time over her mouth, and, lifting her from her feet as easily as if she had been a child, he carried her within the shadow of a door-way in the low building before referred to.

Once there, he sat her down upon her feet again, though he still kept her mouth firmly covered with his hand.

"I've got to have it, d'ye hear?" he said, fiercely; "if not by fair means, why, then, by foul. I've no wish to harm you, and if you'll give it up *quietly* I'll let you go; if you won't, it will be the worst for you, that's all. Will you give it up? Nod your head if you mean yes."

Editha could scarcely breathe, his hand was so heavily pressed over her mouth and nostrils, and she was absolutely powerless in the strong man's grasp.

She knew she was at his mercy, but she knew also that he could not get possession of her treasure without removing his hand from her face, which would give her an advantage over him, because she could call for help,

So, instead of nodding her head as he had commanded her to do, she resolutely signified her defiance by a decided shake.

The man uttered a round oath at this.

Evidently he had not anticipated any such determined resistance, and for a moment he appeared undecided what to do.

"I'd like to strangle what little life there is left in that traitor out of him," he muttered, angrily, referring to John Loker.

His sentence was hardly completed when he uttered a suppressed howl.

Editha's white teeth had suddenly closed over the fleshy part of his palm with a force that made him cringe with pain, and at the same time remove something of the pressure over her mouth.

Taking advantage of this, she threw back her head with a violent motion and sent forth a shrill cry for help.

The cry was her salvation, and help was nearer than either of them thought.

A quick, firm tread soon sounded upon the pavement, and then the tall form of a policeman became visible close at hand.

The villain saw that his "game was up," and that the wisest thing for him to do would be to get out of the way, and, with another fierce oath, he released his hold upon his victim and beat a hasty and inglorious retreat, vowing vengeance upon her in the future.

With succor at hand, and the disappearance of her captor, Editha's courage and strength failed her utterly.

Her nerves had received a terrible shock, for which she of necessity had now to pay the penalty.

She did not faint, nor go into hysterics, nor make any other disturbance, but she clung in speechless terror and

trembling to the sturdy policeman who had come to her aid.

"Are you hurt, miss? Did the villain *dare* to hurt you?" he asked, sternly.

"No, not much; but, oh, oh! he frightened me terribly, she whispered, shaking as with the ague, and her teeth chattering audibly.

"Poor thing! poor thing! this is a bad place for such as you to be in," he answered, pityingly. "I thought to watch for you," he continued, "until you came out from John Loker's house, and then take you safely through this dismal street; but there was a scrimmage down here apiece, and I had to go. But I was a sort 'o looking for you as I came along back, and I suspected at once that it was you when I heard you cry out. Did the wretch steal anything from you?"

"No; but he wanted something which he knew I had, and I wouldn't give it to him."

"*Wouldn't*, eh?" repeated the policeman, with a little chuckle at her spirit and resolute tone. "Should you know him if you should ever meet him again?" he asked, presently.

"Oh, yes," Editha answered, with a shudder, feeling that it would be impossible ever to forget that repulsive face that had so startled her at the window in John Loker's miserable home.

She was now beginning to recover her strength, and signified her readiness to go on if her companion would accompany her. She longed to get away from the dismal place, and as if she would never dare enter a by-street again as long as she lived.

The man readily went with her to the next street, and waited to see her safely seated in a car, and in less than fifteen minutes she was once more in her own luxurious home, heartily thankful for her escape from a ruffian's power.

Mr. Dalton expressed some surprise at her being out so late—remarked, with some indifference, that she looked pale, and asked if she was not well, and then added that dinner had been waiting for more than half an hour.

She simply replied that she was well, and regretted that he should have waited dinner for her, but she had been unavoidably detained.

Editha Dalton knew that she must keep her own counsel regarding that evening's adventures.

The time had come when she could not trust her dearest interests in the hands of her father. She knew he would have no sympathy with her regarding the confession she had

obtained and would oppose rather than aid her in making it public to vindicate Earle.

But she had resolved to go to Mr. Felton, on the morrow, put the precious evidence in his hands, and be guided by his ever wise counsel.

She retired to her own rooms as soon as dinner was dispatched, and immediately set herself to work to make a careful copy of John Loker's confession to send to Earle. And then, with something of the fear creeping over her that she had experienced while in Tom Drake's power, she looked around for a safe place in which to hide the original. She would not take it below and put in into the safe, for she knew that burglars were not troubled nowadays about opening such things, let them have ever so complicated a lock, and she could not sleep until it was safely disposed of somewhere.

"*What* shall I do with it?" she said, with flushed cheeks and anxious brow. "Something tells me I must *hide* it even for to-night."

No drawer with any common lock would be a safe place, she reasoned—she could not keep it about her person, and for a long time it was a matter that caused her much perplexity. All at once her eyes lighted. In her jewel-box, which was quite a large one, there was a raised velvet cushion, with places on it for the different articles of jewelry she was in the habit of wearing.

This cushion was securely glued to the bottom of the box. What omen of impending evil could have inspired Editha with the idea that underneath this would be a safe place to hide her evidence?

She carefully pryed it from the box, folded the papers just to fit the bottom, then, pressing the cushions firmly back into its place, she once more arranged her jewels in their accustomed position, and then, apparently satisfied with her work, she resumed her seat and began to write an account of her adventures to her dear one across the sea.

It is said that "coming events cast their shadows before;" whether this be true or not, I cannot say, but one thing is certain, and that is that it was *well* for Earle Wayne's honor that Editha Dalton was guided by her impressions to so adroitly conceal John Loker's confession just where she did and just *when* she did.

The next morning Editha did not make her appearance at the breakfast-table.

This was something unusual, for the young girl had always made it a point, even since Mrs. Dalton's death, to be neatly and attractively dressed and in her place opposite her father

promptly every morning upon the ringing of the breakfast-bell.

Mr. Dalton, angry at thus being obliged to wait two successive meals for her, curtly ordered a servant to go and awake her, and tell her he was waiting for her.

The girl hastened to do his bidding, but soon returned, with pale and affrighted face, saying that Miss Editha was not in her chamber, her bed had not been occupied during the night, and that both sitting-room and bedroom were in the direst confusion.

Mr. Dalton, was of course, instantly alarmed at this startling intelligence, and hastened at once to investigate the matter.

He found it was even worse than the girl had stated. Drawers, boxes, and closets had been overturned and emptied of their contents, and lay scattered in every direction upon the floor, chairs, and bed. Clothing had been unfolded, shaken out, and then thrown hastily aside; dresses were lying over chairs, with their pockets turned inside out and rifled of their contents.? Editha's costly writing-desk was overturned upon the floor, her letters and papers scattered in every direction; and then it was for the first time that Mr. Dalton knew for a certainty of her correspondence with Earle, for stooping down to pick up these letters, he had gathered up with others those that the young man had sent across the sea to her.

Never had those beautiful rooms been in such dire confusion before, and nothing seemed to be missing but Editha's jewelry, which had been taken from its box, and that was left standing, empty and open, in its accustomed place, and a very common hat and circular waterproof, which she had been in the habit of wearing in stormy weather. Editha herself was gone—that was evident, and no one appeared to know when nor whither.

Mr. Dalton was nearly stupefied at first, and the thought flashed upon him that she might have fled to Earle.

But he soon dismissed this idea, for he knew her character well enough to know that if she was bound to marry Earle Wayne she would do it boldly, openly, and in defiance of the whole world; moreover, she never would have gone away voluntarily and left things in that style, taking nothing with her for her own comfort or needs.

No, it was a deep and incomprehensible mystery.

Days and weeks were devoted to the search of her. Detectives were employed, the police were notified, and advertisements were inserted in all the leading papers, but all

without avail; no clew could be gained as to the whereabouts of the missing girl; and Mr. Dalton was at last left entirely alone and desolate in his beautiful home.

Only one thing was discovered that seemed to have any bearing on the matter, and that was her adventure with the unknown ruffian after her visit to John Loker's house.

The policeman who had rescued her gave an account of what he knew of the matter, and then Mr. Dalton went himself to see the wretched family, thinking perhaps some further information might be gleaned from them.

But John Loker had died the day following Editha's visit there, and after the funeral the family had disappeared, and no one knew anything of them.

To say that Mr. Dalton was not extremely distressed over the strange affair would be very unjust to him.

He availed himself of every possible means to solve the dreadful mystery; but, as we have already seen, he was an utterly selfish man, and it was not in his nature to brood over anything either troublesome or disagreeable; and the source from which he at length drew consolation may perhaps be revealed by the following soliloquy with himself, as he sat one night in the library, considering the pros and cons of the future:

"If anything—ah—fatal—*should* have—happened to Editha—if she should not be—*living*, her—fortune then will be—*mine*, I suppose."

And even while he spoke a strange look settled over his face, there was a queer quaver in his voice, and he was as white as the immaculate tie which he wore about his neck.

CHAPTER XXI

FATAL TRUST

TWENTY-ONE or two years before our story opens there resided in Richmond, one of the beautiful suburbs of London, the Right Honorable Warrenton Fairfield Vance, Marquis of Wycliffe, and who also possessed another title; but of that more hereafter.

He was the eldest of the two children of a previous Warrenton Fairfield Vance, whose strange will created so much discussion and remark at the time of his death, several years before.

There were only two children, we have said, the present

marquis and his sister, who, although considerably younger than himself, had married, very early in life, a man of literary profession, though of a wealthy and respectable family—Tressalia by name.

She had one child, a son, Arthur Tressalia, and father of the Paul Tressalia of our story.

Arthur Tressalia died when his son Paul was only three years of age, and his grandmother, the marquis' sister, two years afterward.

The old marquis' will, before referred to, had entailed his estates in a very peculiar and rather perplexing way.

They were to descend to the eldest *legitimate* child of each generation, be it son or daughter.

In case it should be a daughter, it was stated that, upon her marriage, her husband would be obliged to assume the family name, and so perpetuate the race.

In case the eldest child died without issue, or gave birth to an illegitimate child, the entail would be cut off from that branch of the family and revert in the same way to the eldest child.

For instance, if the present Marquis of Wycliffe died without legitimate issue, the estates, title, and name would descend to his sister, Mrs. Tressalia, and her legitimate heirs, according to the provisions of the will.

In the event of an utter failure of legitimate issue, the estates would fall to the crown, and the personal property to the enrichment of several public charitable institutions mentioned in the will.

The Marquis of Wycliffe, at the time we speak of in the beginning of the chapter, had one child, a daughter, sixteen years of age.

He had not married until long after his sister, having been disappointed by a heartless coquette when quite a young man, before coming into his property, and for many years he could not endure the thought of marriage. But he had at length wedded a gentle, lovable girl of good family, and she had given birth to this little daughter, and no more children were granted them.

It had been a great disappointment to the marquis that this child was not a son; but the little Marion Vance was a very beautiful and charming little piece of humanity, although exceedingly high-spirited and wilful, as will be seen ere long.

Her mother had died when she was only twelve years of age, after which she was left to the care of a not too conscientious governess, who enjoyed her own ease and

reading French novels more than she did the training of her wild and rebellious pupil.

Thus the motherless girl was left to come up pretty much after her own will, and it is not so much to be wondered at that, with no wise and tender hand to guide, no warning voice to chide, counsel, and direct, her future should be planted with thorns, and that the life which gave promise in its budding of so much beauty and joy should, in the blooming, be marred and blighted by grave and fatal mistakes.

During the summer of Marion Vance's sixteenth year the marquis permitted her to visit some distant relatives of the family living at Rye, near the sea, in South Sussex County.

These relatives consisted of father, mother, and four gay, blooming daughters, the latter as full of fun and mischief as the day is long; and no one was ever known, up to this time, to visit the Surrey mansion and go away without regretting the bright days that had flown all too quickly.

We have said that Marion Vance was wilful, and a little incident will serve to prove our assertion. Upon reaching her destination on this eventful summer, the obstinate little marchioness eldest had insisted upon being introduced into the society frequented by the Surrey family as plain Miss Vance, devoid of either title or any particularly alluring future prospects.

"I shall be so much happier not to be hampered with all the forms and ceremonies that are so irksome at home, and which papa is so tenacious of," said the little lady, as she persistently argued her point with the family.

"But I am in doubt as to the propriety of such a proceeding for that very reason—your papa would not approve," demurred Madam Surrey, disliking to refuse the bright girl's request, yet fearing even more to offend the marquis.

"Ah, *please* let me be happy in my own way for a little while. At home I am my Lady This and my Lady That, until I hate the word, and long to get out of my strait-jacket and enjoy a little freedom," sighed the fair pleader, coaxingly.

There was no resisting the insinuating tones, the sweet blue eyes, and the pretty, pouting mouth; so for eight short, happy weeks the child of the aristocratic Marquis of Wycliffe was simply Miss Marion Vance, and a merrier quintette than those five—Kate, Ida, Caroline, and Isabel, with Marion—made could not have been found elsewhere in all South Sussex County.

The Honorable Andrew Surrey's residence was a most charming one, overlooking the sea, and that year it was christened by the surrounding neighborhood "The Home of the Nymphs," in honor of the charming beauties residing there.

But dire calamity and sorrow were destined to overtake these beautiful and careless nymphs ere their summer holiday, begun with so much of happiness and promise, should end, and the memory of it was the means of saddening their whole after life.

During one of their many excursions and picnics, Marion Vance made the acquaintance of a young man, who was introduced to her as Mr. George Sumner.

He was about twenty-two years of age, not handsome, nor even fine-looking, but possessed of a singular fascination of manner that attracted her from the very first.

He was introduced by a young man who was somewhat attentive to Miss Kate Surrey, and who had met him at the German University, where he was studying.

He knew nothing of him, beyond that he always had plenty of money, and report said he was to fall heir to great possessions upon the death of some aged relative.

He had been well received at the university, and it was supposed that he belonged to a highly respectable family, and he was consequently admitted into the best of society there.

Marion Vance, with her fresh young heart, her susceptible nature and impulse, was not long in learning to love this fascinating stranger, which feeling Mr. Sumner appeared to reciprocate, and, before half of her visit had expired, he was secretly her declared lover.

The gay Misses Surreys, intent upon their own beaux and pleasures, were culpably heedless of the mischief that was brewing in their midst, and of the toils which were being so cunningly woven around their fair young visitor.

They were all older than Marion, and should have guarded her against the constant attentions of any one.

Madam Surrey, amid her many household cares, could not always attend them upon their excursions, and whenever she did accompany them she never dreamed that beneath the quiet and polite attentions of Mr. Sumner to Marion there lurked any deeper feeling than that of mere friendship.

Marion, too, with wonderful tact, disguised her feelings, for Mr. Sumner, and, for various unexplained reasons, had insisted that their love for each other must for the present be kept a profound secret; but, with the fire and impulse

which made up her nature, she gave her whole heart up into his keeping, and learned only when it was too late the heartlessness and treachery of which her lover was capable and she the victim.

George Sumner, on his own part, had no other motive in winning the affections of this beautiful and trusting girl than his own selfish enjoyment of an idle summer's day.

His vacation must be spent somewhere, and he had drifted in an aimless way to the neighborhood, having heard of its beauties in the way of scenery and its advantages as a summer resort.

Marion was beautiful in looks, gay and attractive in manner, and just such a girl as he liked to flirt with, but as for ever marrying and acknowledging her as his wife, he had not such a thought.

He supposed her a simply country girl, defective in education and knowledge of social customs—as, indeed, the poor child was, having been left so long to the tender mercies of a careless governess.

He never dreamed that she was other than she pretended to be—simply Marion Vance, with neither dowry nor position in life. But *his* wife, when he married, must possess something more substantial than a pretty face and winning manners—she must have wealth and position in order to satisfy the ambitious desires of the aspiring Mr. Sumner.

But Marion, fondly believing that he loved her for herself alone, drifted carelessly and happily along with the tide, and, being of a somewhat romantic turn of mind, resolved to enjoy till the very last this simple love-making, and, when she had fully tested the strength and devotion of her valiant knight, come out grandly and declare who she was, thus surprising and rewarding him abundantly for his fidelity. Silly child! Fatal trust!

Like the cunning spider, he wove his net firmly about her, and then left her to die by inches in its cruel toils.

Before six weeks of her visit had passed he had enticed her into a secret marriage, sighing sweetly of "love in a cottage" and the "devotion of a life-time;" and Marion too blissfully happy to stop to look into the future, and enjoying the novelty and romance of her position in being so tenderly loved for her own bright self, never dreamed of the abyss into which she was plunging with such headlong speed.

They were married one still summer night, in a little chapel in a neighboring town, by an aged minister, who (somewhat to the surprise and annoyance of Mr. Sumner, who had no idea of carrying the sacrilege so far) gave into the young

bride's hands at the close of the ceremony a certificate of that transaction.

But when the time came for her return to her father, Marion began to fear she had made a great mistake, and grave questions began to suggest themselves for answering.

How would the proud and aristocratic marquis receive the knowledge of her marriage?

How would he regard the son-in-law who would stoop to win and marry his daughter in this underhanded and clandestine manner?

During the last week of her stay at Rye, Mr. Sumner informed her that he had received an imperative summons away on business.

"But, George, I must go home next week, and then papa must be told of our marriage. I supposed, of course, you would go with me, and we could confess it together," Marion opposed.

Mr. Sumner frowned at this remark, then looked troubled and perplexed.

"I cannot go with you now; my summons is positive. You will have to be patient and wait awhile until I can come to you," he answered, as indifferently as though he had not been plotting the cruelest wrong in the world.

"But I want the matter settled. I want papa to see you, and I also wanted to tell you——"

She stopped, resolving that she would not tell him of her future prospects until they could confess their secret marriage to her father.

"It cannot be just yet," he said, impatiently, and not heeding her interrupted sentence. "My business must be attended to, and our secret can wait a little longer."

"You are sure you love me only for my very self, George?" she asked, nestling in his arms, and winding her own around his neck.

"What else should I love you for, little one?" he returned; and well it was for her peace of mind that she could not see the smile of scorn that curled his lips at her question.

She laughed a merry, happy laugh, thinking how proud she should be when he returned to her, and she should tell him that she was the child of a marquis and heiress to almost unlimited wealth.

"And you do not regret what we have done?" she asked, laying her golden head upon his breast, with a gesture so full of confidence and love that a feeling of startled fear stole over him for the moment.

"What is there to regret, my little one? Have we not been happy as the day is long?" he asked, evasively.

"You are *sure* you do not regret, George?" she persisted; and now the blue eyes were lifted anxiously to read his face.

"No, I do not regret," he said; and the sickening horror with which she afterward remembered those words she never forgot as long as she lived.

He would write to her often until he could come to her, he said, when she wept at parting, and agreed with her that their marriage must be kept a secret until he could come himself and tell her father.

As his letters would arouse suspicion if sent directly to Wycliffe in her name, and as he was not known at Richmond, he would direct them to Mrs. George Sumner, and she could get them herself at the office.

Marion went home to Wycliffe to wait for his coming, and growing to fear more and more, as the days went by, that she had done very wrong, and her father would be very angry when he should discover it, but hoping that all would come right when she should be able to introduce her husband, and the marquis would be charmed as she had been by his fascinating manners and his brilliant power of conversation.

But the weeks lengthened into months, and though his letters came quite regularly, no George Sumner made his appearance, or gave any hope that he should be able to do so for a good while to come.

At last his letters ceased coming, and then, indeed, the poor child grew nearly wild with grief, fear, and anxiety.

She became pale and thin, her eyes lusterless and heavy, while she spent hours in her own rooms weeping and walking the floor, her hands clasped convulsively on her breast, her head drooping with its burden of anguish.

She wrote and wrote again with the same result, and at last, in despair, sent forth an appeal that ought to have melted the stoutest heart.

He *must* come to her, she said—it was not possible that their marriage could be kept a secret any longer. They must tell her father and share the consequences as best they could.

She waited a week, ten days, a fortnight, and no answer came to her distressing appeal, and she wept and moaned almost constantly, admitting no one to her presence, and scarcely leaving her apartments.

About this time the marquis was called away from home on business that would occupy him for a week.

Scarcely had he taken his departure when, with sudden resolution, Marion informed her governess that she, also, was going away for a few days.

Mademoiselle Dufrond at once became very angry at this intimation.

The marquis had recently expressed himself displeased that his daughter was not attending more closely to her studies, and desired that Mademoiselle Dufrond would be more particular henceforth.

"Mademoiselle must not go away," she reiterated, "Monsieur, her father, had explicitly said she must attend more closely to her studies."

Study! with that terrible burden pressing her down until she was almost crushed.

The child felt that she should scream aloud at the thought.

"I cannot study; I am sick," she said; and, unheeding the angry remonstrance that followed, she left Wycliffe the day following the marquis' departure, and told no one whither she was going.

CHAPTER XXII

A WIFE'S APPEAL

MR. GEORGE SUMNER was agreeably entertaining a few of his friends in his handsome lodgings in London one raw, dismal night in January.

But there was no suspicion of either cold or gloom in the luxurious rooms where these boon companions were making merry.

A cheerful fire burned brightly in the polished grate; the candelabra were filled with waxen tapers, which, shedding their light over the closely drawn crimson curtains, cast a rosy glow over the whole apartment.

Pictures hung upon the walls, some fine and beautiful, while others were not of the most chaste character imaginable; flowers bloomed and shed their fragrance from various costly vases; busts of marble and figures in bronze were scattered here and there, and the whole apartment bespoke extravagance and luxurious living.

A table was spread in the center of the room, glittering with cut glass and silver, and heaped with a profusion of viands, fruits, and wines of a quality to tempt the daintiest epicurean taste.

Four young men sat around this table, but for the mo-

ment suspending their operations upon the good things set before them, while they listened to a bacchanalian song from one of their number

A knock at this moment interrupted the singer, and Mr. Sumner, arising, went to answer the summons.

A servant handed him a card and waited for orders, a look of curious interest upon his face.

A scowl of anger clouded George Sumner's face as he read the name which Marion had written with trembling fingers upon its smooth surface.

He passed out into the corridor, shutting the door after him.

"Where is the lady?" he asked of the servant, in a low tone.

"In the anteroom at the end of the passage," he answered, with a peculiar grin.

It was not considered just the thing for a young lady to call, unattended, upon a gentleman at his lodgings, particularly at so late an hour of the night.

"Very well; tell her I will be there in a few minutes," George Sumner said, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

The servant bowed and retired, while he returned to his company.

As soon as he could make it come right, he said:

"Boys, I'm in a troublesome fix; I've just received a summons upon important business, and shall be obliged to leave you."

Mr. Sumner, it seems, was in the habit of receiving "summons upon important business," and there was now a noisy protest against his leaving them.

"I must," he said, with some show of impatience; "but you can stay and finish the feast; and, if I can possibly put off the unpleasant affair, or get excused, I'll return right away."

Not staying to listen to their repeated regrets, George Sumner hurried from the room and bent his steps to the little reception-room at the end of the corridor.

As he opened the door the first object that met his eyes was a forlorn figure seated upon the sofa, her golden head bowed in an attitude of weariness and misery upon its arm.

As he expected, it was Marion.

At the first sound of his footsteps upon the threshold she started wildly up and threw herself, weeping, into his arms.

"Oh, George, I am so miserable! Why did you not come to me? Why did you not write to me?" she cried excitedly.

"I did not come to you because I could not. I did not write

because I was too busy. You should have had patience," he said, coldly; and, releasing himself from her embrace, he seated her again upon the sofa, and then stood waiting before her.

His coolness, almost amounting to disgust, calmed her more effectually than any words could have done.

She caught her breath back in a sob of pain, and regarded him with wondering eyes.

"And if I had 'patience,' how soon would you have come to me?" she asked, with a note of scorn in her voice.

"I don't know," he answered, moodily.

"*You don't know!* after what I wrote you!" she cried, in breathless astonishment, and with quivering lips.

"Marion," he said, after a moment's thought, and with sudden resolution, "*I could not have come at all!*"

"*You—could—not—have—come—at—all!*" she repeated, every bit of color forsaking her face at the dreadful words.

"That was what I said," he replied, sullenly, and feeling as he had never in his life felt before, with those eyes, so full of horrible anguish, fixed upon him.

"George, *what* do you mean? Surely *not* what you say?"

The hollow tones in which these words were uttered were fearfully calm now, and the little hands which he had so often held and kissed were clenched until the nails were purple.

"Yes, Marion," he said, firmly, and with a cold, merciless glitter in his eyes—he might as well finish this business first as last—"I do mean just what I have said, and it was very imprudent in you to come here to-night; it will subject me to very unpleasant and annoying remarks."

"I do not understand you," the white lips uttered, in the same tone as before, though Marion's blue eyes glittered as he had never seen them, and her small head was lifted in sudden though bitter pride. "I cannot understand how the coming of your *wife* can subject you to 'unpleasant and annoying remarks,'" she added, when he did not reply.

"Can you not, when it is not known that I have a wife?" he asked, a little smile that she could not interpret curving his lips.

His coldness and indifference were nearly killing her.

"True! I have forgotten; I am bewildered; I am nearly *crazed* with my misery. But, George, that fact can be no longer concealed; you must return with me to Richmond and confess our marriage to papa. I must be owned as a lawful wife before another day passes," she said, wearily, yet with decision.

"Impossible, Marion!"

"And why impossible?" she demanded, with flashing eyes. "Do you understand that the secret *cannot* be kept any longer—that it must be confessed at once?"

"Nevertheless it *is* impossible! I—I regret that there should be anything unpleasant about the matter; but I cannot go with you to Mr. Vance and tell him that you are my wife, simply because, Marion, *you are not my wife!*" he concluded, with a sigh of relief that the truth was at last out.

"*George!* why *will* you jest thus when I am so miserable?" shrieked the unhappy girl, throwing up her arms with a gesture of despair.

She could not believe that he spoke the truth, and yet there was something horribly real about it all.

George Sumner looked uneasily around at that outburst. It would not do to have the whole house know that a young and beautiful girl had sought him there at that time of night.

He went to her side and seized her firmly by the wrists.

"Be still, Marion," he said, angrily, "and listen to me, and do not make another sound while you are here, unless you intend to ruin us both."

She looked at him with hollow, bewildered eyes, too miserable and stunned by his words and manner to hardly comprehend what he was saying.

"When I went down to Rye last summer," he resumed, coldly, and with a determined air, "I went merely to have a jolly good time. I found a lot of pretty girls there, and I joined their set and met you, and had not then the slightest intention of doing you any wrong. You were young, gay, and pretty, and I made love to you, as I have done to a dozen others before. On the impulse of the moment I proposed a secret marriage, not having the least idea that you would consent to it; but you did, and I found myself in a fix. I *could* not marry you in good faith, for the girl whom I marry must have plenty of money and an established position in the world; you had neither, and I had to get out of the scrape I was in as best I could."

Marion Vance here opened her lips with sudden eagerness, as if to speak, then as suddenly closed them again, and a strange look of fire and scorn mingled with the bitterness and pain in her eyes.

"But," he went on, not noticing it, too intent upon getting the scene over with as soon as possible, "when you accepted my proposal I had to do *something*; so I got a friend of mine to disguise himself to look like the old rector of

St. John's chapel, and, by bribing the sexton, he allowed us to go into the church for the ceremony to be performed."

"And *that* was the way you married me—*me!*" she whispered, in suppressed tones, never once having taken her eyes from his during the horrible recital.

"I could not help it, Marion—you gave yourself away to me so readily, you adopted so eagerly my proposals," he said, excusing himself by blaming her.

Her lips curled.

"Have you nothing better than that to say for yourself? Have you no reparation to offer me?" she asked.

And he answered, coldly:

"None!"

"George," she cried, in agony, "think how I have loved you, how I have trusted you! Can you let me suffer thus and show me no pity?"

"My pity could do you no practical good now," he answered, carelessly.

"And you *will not* right the wrong—you will not cover my shame?"

"I cannot," he still repeated.

"George Sumner, you do not know the bitter, cruel wrong that you are doing. Ah, Heaven! why was I so blind, so mad that I did not see and realize it myself? You do not once dream of the misery you are entailing upon future generations," she cried, with clasped hands upraised in agony, as she remembered her father in his pride, and the will of the previous marquis, and knew that unless she became a lawful wife the entail would be cut off from that branch of their family, her father's hopes forever destroyed, and herself irretrievably disgraced; and yet with a strange perversity she would not tell the man who had betrayed her of her position, when she knew it was that alone he desired, and not herself or her love.

She would rather die than marry him and lift him to the position he craved, and know all the time that she was an unloved wife, a despised stepping-stone to his ambition.

If he would but show the least sign of relenting, or of his by-gone affection for her, she would have told him joyfully.

But he did not, he had none to show, and his next words extinguished every hope.

"Marion, there is no use in prolonging this interview; what you wish cannot be."

Reader, did you ever see any one grow instantly old—the light, and life, and joy fade forever out of a face that

had been fresh and lovely in one moment of time; and lines of age, misery, and care settle where there had been nothing but beauty before? If so, you may know something of how Marion Vance looked as she listened to what George Sumner told her on that dismal night in January, as she sat in that little reception-room at the end of the passage.

"Can I believe you?" she said. "Can I believe any one would ruin a young and trusting girl like that? You mean to tell me that it was only a mock marriage—that ceremony and certificate that the pretended old man gave me only a sham?"

"That was all," George Sumner confessed, feeling strangely uneasy with those unearthly eyes fixed so steadily upon him.

"That was *all!*" she repeated, with bitter emphasis. "I have but one more question to ask you," she continued, still unnaturally calm, but looking like a dead person, all but her burning, restless eyes. "Once for all, will you marry me *now*, legally and honorably?"

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because, as I told you, it is absolutely necessary that the woman I marry should have plenty of money and an established position in the world," he said, flushing beneath her look.

Marion smiled that strange smile again.

"Then, if I could bring you plenty of money, and assure of my undisputed right to a good position in society, you would perhaps do me the honor to make me your wife?"

"Yes—I suppose I might," he replied, hesitatingly.

"And you will *not* do that act of justice to save the woman you have professed to love 'better than your own life' from the shame and disgrace that must surely come upon her without?"

"I cannot; I——"

"*What* hinders you?" she interrupted, with an imperative gesture.

His face assumed a dogged expression.

"The determination to be *rich* and move in the highest circles," he said, his tone assuming something of defiance.

"Then you are not *rich* now—you do not rightly belong to the high sphere that is accredited to you—you are only a poor, miserable fortune-hunter after all—a sham and impostor!" she cried, with biting sarcasm and indignation.

He flushed even more hotly than before; his gaze wavered

and fell beneath the scorn in her eye, and he stood revealed in his real character before her.

"You cannot, therefore, be hampered with a poor wife; she would be a miserable clog upon your laudable ambition. Love, pure and holy though it might be, weighs as nothing compared with the treasures you seek," she went on, until, goaded to desperation by her scorn, he turned upon her with a snarl.

"You have learned the truth at last—what more do you want?"

"I want to know, George Sumner—and I charge you speak the truth—did you *ever* love me as *I* understand the word? Is there anything of that feeling still in your heart for me? Is there a particle of feeling in your heart that would prompt you to sacrifice a single interest to save me from my impending ruin? Do not dare to speak falsely—tell me, have you any love for me?" she concluded, with a solemnity that made his flesh creep, bold and bad as he was.

With his eyes fixed upon the carpet, as though they had been weighted and held there, he answered:

"No; I do not love you, Marion."

"Is there one in all the world whom you do love thus?"

"Not one," he said.

"Not even among the 'dozen' with whom you have flirted?" she said, with a hard laugh.

He cringed uneasily. He was showing himself up in a way that was not at all agreeable to him.

"Enough!" she cried, sternly, without waiting for him to reply; and she arose and stood before him, confronting him like an avenging angel. "George Sumner, you are a heartless wretch, selfish to the core, and bent upon your own sensual enjoyment alone. You stand there and seek to cast the blame of my misery all upon me. You say 'you' could not help it. I 'gave myself away to you so readily,' and 'adopted your proposals too eagerly.' Who was it that begged and pleaded for my love, who could not live without me, who would be willing to share a crust, so that he might but be blessed with my presence? Who was it that swore life-long devotion to me, and tempted me with blissful pictures of 'love in a cottage,' and whose heart would break if separated from me for but a day? It does not sound so well repeated under existing circumstances, does it, my aspiring knight?" she continued, even more bitterly: "the heart of the sentiment is gone, and it becomes but an empty, mocking sound. But do you realize how young I was, George

Sumner?" she said, speaking sternly now—"sixteen! with no mother to guide me, no dear, wise friend in whom to confide, or of whom to seek counsel. You were twenty-two, and had flirted with a dozen before me. Did you ruin them all, traitor, coward that you are? Did you lure them all into secret marriages, and then cast them off in their misery, as you are to-night casting me? Or were they wiser than I—not so eager to give themselves away, or to adopt your proposals?

"You need not speak," she cried, bitterly, as he opened his lips as if to defend himself. "I never wish to hear your voice again, and if I could paralyze your tongue so that you could never cheat a trusting woman again, I would do it; but it is not for me to avenge—your punishment is coming; it is nearer even than you dream. You are ambitious, but that very ambition has overreached itself, as you will find before you are a great deal older. You are a cheat, a liar, and a coward; and now let me tell you that I would not marry you *if my doing so would save both your life and mine*. I will bear my shame alone, and some day your eyes will be opened, and you will curse yourself with bitterest curses that you have dared to do the thing that you have done. I was a young and inexperienced girl; you won my fresh, pure love, and ruined me, to pass away a dull hour and have a 'jolly good time.' A day, an hour will come when you will turn sick with remorse, and be willing to give the best years of your life to undo the foul wrong which you have so heartlessly wrought; but you will never see Marion Vance, the girl with neither 'name,' nor 'wealth,' nor 'position,' again."

She turned and walked, with a quick, firm tread, from the room, before he could recover his almost stupefied senses.

He had never dreamed that the simple, trusting, loving girl, whom he had hitherto been able to mold to his lightest wish, possessed so much spirit and reserve power, and her burning, blighting words had fallen upon him like flashes of lightning, blinding and bewildering him with their vividness.

But she was gone—that farce was played out to the end, and though the end had been anything but agreeable, yet it was over at last; and, smoothing his ruffled brow and calling a smile to his false lips, he went back to his boon companions, and tried to drown the heart-broken words of a ruined girl in copious draughts of sparkling champagne.

CHAPTER XXIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

MARION VANCE, after leaving the man whom, during that one hour's interview, she had learned to loathe and despise as intensely as before she had loved him, returned directly to Wycliffe, where in the silence of her own room, she waited in dumb despair for the return of the marquis.

Then, with a stern, set face, she sought everything—how she had refused while away on her visit to be introduced as his daughter, and thus brought upon herself this misery—and that when she found that the one upon whom she had lavished her affection cared only for position and wealth, she had kept silence, resolving rather to suffer her shame than to gratify his ambition when he proved to be so heartless and base. The only thing she reserved was the name of the man for whom she had sacrificed her birthright; and no amount of persuasions or threats could compel her to reveal it.

The marquis sat stern and rigid while listening to this confession from his only child.

He uttered no reproaches, he gave way to no violent passion or grief, only when she had concluded, he pointed with shaking finger to the door, saying, with perfectly hueless lips:

"Do you know, Marion Vance, what you have done? You have cut off the inheritance forever from my heirs—you have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage, and it will go to Arthur Tressalia's son, your cousin Paul. Do you hear? You have ruined both yourself and me. You have made me worse than childless. Go, and never let me look upon your face again while you live."

"Papa, do not—oh! do not send me away alone—alone into the cold, cruel world. I am your only child. I have no one but you. I love you, papa. Oh, have mercy! Let me stay here in my home. I will be very quiet and humble. I will never trouble you, only let me be where I can see and hear you sometimes," Marion cried, in her despair, as she cast herself upon her knees before the stern man.

He turned away from her with a face of stone, yet with a heart bursting with disappointment and agony equal to her own.

"Go, I say. You shall not suffer; you shall have three hundred pounds a year, and more if that is not enough; but

never let me see you again. I could not bear it and live," was all he said in reply to her agonized entreaties.

Marion tottered from the room, praying that the earth would open and swallow her and her misery, and bury her in oblivion.

That day she left Wycliffe forever.

She fled to a small town in the south-west of England, assumed a name, and lived there in quiet seclusion until her son was seventeen years of age.

Her heart was broken, her life was ruined, but she never told her boy the story of her shame and the disgrace she had entailed upon him until she lay upon her dying bed.

He had got the idea, and always believed, that his father had died before he was born, and seeing that it pained his mother to talk of the past, he never mentioned it.

Marion determined, since she had been the means of robbing him of his proud title and position, that she would devote her life to him, and rear him with a character stamped with grandeur with which no worldly title could ever endow him.

She taught him to hate everything mean or low—to love and cling to the truth, no matter what opposed—to be a *manly man*, never despising or exalting any one on account of position alone; but to admire and emulate true worth wherever he might find it, and regard every one whom he could respect as an equal.

She gave him the very best education that her means would allow; and, being naturally bright and talented, he was at seventeen far in advance of other youths of his age. Marion's health now began to fail, and it soon became evident to her that all that remained to her of life would be a very brief span.

As she grew weaker day by day, she became greatly depressed in her mind regarding the past and its connection with her son's future, and at last she called him to her and told him all the sad story of her life; and all his outraged manhood, all his deep and tender love for her, arose in arms as he listened.

"Mother!" he cried, his head thrown back, his eyes flashing fire, his nostrils dilating, his lips quivering with indignation, shame, and wounded pride, "I will find the man—no, I cannot call him a *man*—the brute who dared to do so vile a thing, and I will brand him the traitor and the coward that he is."

"My son, never forget that vengeance belongs to a mightier arm than your own—never forget that *you* belong to a noble race; and even though you may never claim your kindred,

let your life testify to the respect you bear for the blood which flowed in your mother's veins," was all the reply which Marion vouchsafed to his boyish outburst of anger.

"Ah! my dear, gentle little mother," he said, kissing her wasted hands, "you always teach me to do right; but I bear my kindred no love; they have cruelly wronged you. I think I cannot even respect that man whom you say is my grandfather, even though he be the Marquis of Wycliffe. How could he have driven you forth from your home in such bitterness?"

"You do not realize the cruel disappointment it was to him to have his hopes thus ruined. If I had not been so blind and foolish in my love, *you* would now be the heir of all his proud possessions. I have wronged you also, my noble boy," she sighed, in bitter pain.

"Do not think of it, dear mother. It was not your fault; you were cheated and ruined by a designing villain. Oh, that I may meet him some day!" he cried, all the blood of his noble ancestors running riot in his veins.

He was very handsome, and his mother told him that he looked like his grandfather, the Marquis of Wycliffe, which to him, in his bitterness against his treatment of her, sounded like very tame praise.

"Mother," he burst out one day afterward, "have you one particle of affection remaining for—that man?"

"No, my dear. That was crushed; all my wild love was burned to ashes that night when, in my misery, he turned from me, and I went out alone to battle with my shame."

"That is well. But, mother, please do not call it *shame*. *You* were guiltless of any wrong. The *shame*, if there be any, is his," he urged, with troubled brow.

Marion sighed and let the matter drop. If the shame was not to be imputed to her, she had suffered as though it were.

From that day her son was changed.

A new dignity of purpose seemed to crown him. His boyishness dropped from him all at once, and he suddenly developed, mentally, into the full statue of a man. He became grave and thoughtful, but a new and deeper tenderness pervaded all his care of his mother thereafter, making him gentle as a woman in his sympathy and attention to her wants.

She died blessing him, and telling him what a comfort he had been to her all his life, and bidding him not forget the lessons she had taught him of truth and right.

With an almost breaking heart, he buried her under a

noble, sweeping elm, in a quiet spot of the village cemetery, and felt as if he had not a friend upon the face of the earth.

He sent a notice of her death to the Marquis of Wycliffe, declining all further aid from him upon his own behalf, and then went forth into the world to battle for himself.

One thing he resolved to do before settling down to the real business of life, and that was to visit the place where his mother had been made the victim of such baseness and treachery.

He went down to South Sussex County, visited Rye, and all the places she had described to him, and thought of her there, as a fair and innocent girl, filled to the brim with joy and gayety.

He saw the house, the Surrey mansion, where she had spent those eight short, happy weeks and longed to enter, that he might see the rooms where her gay laughter had rang out and her light and nimble feet had danced to tuneless measure.

But he did not even enter the grounds, passing them with a heavy sigh for the happiness that had been sacrificed there; and then he took his way to the little village where St. John's chapel stood, and where that sacrilegious fraud had been perpetrated.

And there he made a startling discovery!

It was nearly sunset when he reached the chapel, and as he lifted his hat on entering the sacred place, still thinking of his mother, who believed herself a happy bride when her feet had crossed its threshold, the last notes of a sweet hymn died away on the organ within.

He crossed the vestibule, and was about opening the inner door, when a lady came down from the organ loft and met him face to face.

She was about twenty-five or six years of age, with a very sweet and lovely though sad face, and she bowed kindly and graciously to the stranger.

He returned the salutation, and then asked if she would tell him where he could find the sexton.

She pointed out to him a little cottage near by, and as he started to go toward it, she turned and walked with him, remarking the beauty of the day and the glorious sunset, which they could see through the overarching trees that grew about the chapel.

More than once he found himself searching her sweet face, and there was something in her manner and in the tones of her voice which made him wonder it at some time in her life she, too, had not suffered deeply.

"Perhaps," he thought, "there is another tale of wrong, and misery, and disappointment connected with *her* life."

They walked together as far as the sexton's house, she passing in to speak to the wife, while he sought the man who was working in the garden.

He questioned him regarding the incidents already related, about the secret marriage that had occurred nearly eighteen years previous; and when the young man told him who he was—the son of that fair young bride—he was surprised to see him betray deep emotion.

"Yes, mister," he said, eyeing him keenly, "I remember clearly the young gentleman and pretty lady that came here to be married, and he, the groom, paid me a handsome sum to leave the chapel unlocked, so that they could go there for the ceremony. He would bring his own clergyman, he said, and as the marriage would have to be kept secret for awhile, he wanted it done as late as possible, and no lights."

The sexton here stopped and leaned reflectively upon the handle of his spade, while he contemplated the neat little chapel visible through the trees.

"I tell you, sir," he at length resumed, "the sight of the gentleman's money won me at first, but when I came to think it all over, I seemed to think that somehow it did not have a right look—their not wanting any lights and coming so late in the evening, to say nothing about their bribing me to let them into the chapel. I thought if it was honest and square, even if the marriage was to be a secret, they might have come quietly but openly, and at a proper time, for the ceremony; and, sir—I beg your pardon if I did wrong, but my conscience was heavy—the gold seemed like the price of innocent blood to me, and I went and confessed the whole thing to the old rector himself, and gave him the money to put in the poor-box."

Marion's son started violently at these last words, and he grew white and trembling.

"*When* did you make this confession—*before* or *after* marriage?" he asked, with intense eagerness.

"The afternoon before, sir. I felt that if there was anything wrong about the affair, the good old rector would see that it was made right. He reprimanded me severely for the betrayal of my trust, as he called it, but he relieved my mind by saying that no wrong should be done. Sir, you are faint," he said, noticing his visitor's ghastly face, which was absolutely startling in its pallor.

"No; go on! go on!" he breathed, in a voice that sounded strange even to himself.

"Well, sir, you had better sit down upon the bench, for you don't look able to stand;" and he indicated a rustic bench near by, and the young man sank weakly upon it, motioning his companion to proceed. "I don't know, sir, how the old rector managed that business, but I *do* know that after that young couple had entered the chapel I crept softly up and looked in through an open window, and—I *heard his reverence marry them good and strong as ever a couple was married in the world.*"

"Are you *sure?*" demanded his listener, actually gasping for breath at this startling and unexpected announcement, while he wiped away the great drops of sweat that had gathered upon his brow.

"As sure, sir, as that I am talking to you at this moment," returned the old man, confidently. "I could not *see* the rector, it is true, for the chapel was dark, but I knew the good old man's voice well, and I *know* that, instead of the young man's clergyman—if a clergyman he had with him at all—marrying them, the rector of St. John's chapel said the ceremony over them himself."

"Oh, if you could prove this to me!" Marion's son said, an agony of longing in his concentrated tones.

The sexton shook his head with an air of perplexity.

"I cannot prove it, sir, except by my word, and I've never told any one before; but you, sir, being the son of the pretty young lady—I had seen her before, strolling with the gentleman—you being her child, have a right to know it."

"The rector! the rector! where is he? If this is true, he can prove it," his companion cried, starting up with excitement.

"Ah, sir, he has been dead these ten years, and there is a young man in his place who could not know anything about this," the sexton replied, with a look of pity at the handsome young stranger who was so painfully agitated.

"And there were no other witnesses—you were the only one who saw and heard this?"

"Yes, sir, I was the only one as far as I know; but," with sudden thought, "I've heard that the old rector never went to bed at night without first writing down everything that had happened during the day, and perhaps Miss Isabel—that's the rector's daughter, sir, as came with you hither, bless her kind heart!—perhaps she could tell you something more about it."

"Thank you. What you have told me to-night is of the most vital importance, as you have doubtless judged by my unavoidable excitement. If what you say can be proved, it

will repair one of the greatest wrongs ever committed upon this earth," Marion's son replied, very gravely.

"I feared it—I feared it at the time—may God forgive me for ever betraying my trust," murmured the old man, brokenly.

"But you atoned for it—you were tempted as all are liable to be tempted, and I hope and trust that your repentance may have been the means of saving a proud name from dishonor."

"Miss Isabel can tell you if any one can," answered the sexton.

"I will wait, then, until she comes from the cottage, and seek an interview with her," returned the youth; and, though his stock of money was none too large, he generously dropped a golden guinea into the old man's hand, and then, too deeply moved to remain quiet, he paced back and forth beneath the trees, while waiting for the rector's daughter to appear.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RECTOR'S DIARY

THE sweet-faced Miss Isabel did not try his patience long. She had been deeply interested in the young and handsome stranger, wondering who he was, and whence he came, as well as why he should seek their quiet little chapel, and then the old sexton.

She had heard his last words to the old man, and knew that he was desirous of speaking with her. She at once arose, and, as soon as she came forth from the cottage, he immediately approached her.

"Pardon," he said, courteously, lifting his hat, "but may I crave a little conversation with you?"

"Certainly," she answered, with a sweet graciousness that made him think of his mother.

He then stated something of his object in coming there, and also the startling revelation of the sexton, as well as what he had said regarding the rector's diary, and begged her, if it was in her power, to let him know the truth of the matter.

Her face grew sad and full of pity as she listened to him, and realized something of the wrong that had been suffered for so many years, and when he had finished she said simply:

"Yes, I can give you comfort. Come with me."

How his heart bounded at the words "I can give you comfort;" and, heaving a breath that was almost a sob, a cry of thankfulness went up to God from his heart for the light that was beginning to shine upon his darkened life.

Miss Isabel Grafton, for that was the lady's name, led the way toward a small villa, built in the Gothic style, near by.

It was a charming little place, covered with vines and climbing roses, and surrounded by noble trees with here and there a patch of gay flowers adding brightness to the scene.

She invited him to enter, and ushered him into a cool and shady parlor, when she excused herself for a few moments. She was not gone long, and when she returned she carried two or three large books in her hand.

"These books," she explained, laying them carefully upon the table, as if they were a precious treasure, "comprise my father's diary, and, I think, never during his life did he omit the record of a single day. I have taken a sad pleasure," she continued, with a starting tear, "in reading them since his death, and I also think that there is considerable here regarding the events of which you speak. Now, if you will please give me the date I will see if I can find it for you."

He told her, and then sat in painful suspense while she turned those pages penned by a hand long since palsied in death, and which might contain so much of hope for him.

"Yes," she said at last, "here is one entry—the first, I think, since it corresponds with the date you gave me;" and she passed him the book to let him read for himself.

His emotion was so great that at first the words seemed blurred and indistinct, and it was a minute or two before his vision became clear enough to read.

Then he read this:

"August 11th, 18—. A strange thing occurred to-day. Thomas Wight, the sexton of St. John's chapel, came to me in evident distress, and confessed a conspiracy in which he was concerned, or rather a wrong into which he had been tempted by the offer of gold, and which lay exceedingly heavy on his heart. A young man had hired him to leave the chapel open after dark that evening, that he might come to be married secretly to a young and beautiful girl, and he told him, moreover, that he would bring his own clergyman with him to perform the ceremony. He paid the sexton a golden eagle to do him the service, which the poor fellow, conscience-smitten like Judas of old, came and delivered up to me for the poor. I resolved at once to investigate the affair, for it appeared to me as if a wrong of some kind was being perpetrated, wherein a young, trusting and per-

haps motherless girl, like my own fair Isabel, was being deceived. The result proved even as I thought—a romance begun, a wrong beheaded.

"An hour before the time that Thomas Wight told me was set apart for the strange couple to come to the chapel, I repaired thither and concealed myself behind the drapery of a curtain in the robing-room. It was nearly dark, but not so dark but that I could distinguish objects quite distinctly, and I had not been there long before a young man, of perhaps thirty years, quietly entered, and immediately proceeded to disguise himself with a white wig and a full, flowing white beard. I knew then, beyond a doubt, that a great wrong was contemplated, for the hair and beard was an exact counterpart of my own. He then approached my private closet, took down the robe and surplice, and was about to put them on, when I stepped forth from my hiding-place and addressed him thus:

"'Friend, what art thou about to do with these emblems of a sacred office? Those are holy vestures which none but a priest unto God has a right to wear.'"

"The robe dropped from his nerveless hand upon the floor, and he turned a white, startled face to me.

"'Who are you?' he at length demanded, with an effort to recover himself.

"'I am Bishop Grafton, and rector of St. John's parish. Who are you?' I asked mildly, in return.

"'It does not matter who I am,' he muttered, angrily, and standing before me with an exceedingly crest-fallen air; and I proceeded with solemn gravity:

"'Friend, I learned this afternoon that a great wrong was to be committed here this evening, and I came here to stop it, if possible.'

"I spoke the words at a venture—and not so, either, for the man's manner had convinced me of the fact already—and my words took immediate effect, for, with a muttered imprecation, he tore the wig and beard from his head and face and threw them also upon the floor beside the robe and surplice.

"'Friend,' I then demanded, sternly, 'are you a minister of Jesus Christ?'

"'No,' he muttered, with a vile oath.

"'Then you were about to personate a bishop of the church and commit sacrilege. I will relieve you from both the mockery and the sin. I will myself perform this marriage ceremony.'

"'But——' he began, in an excited manner.

"'You will please give me the names of the parties about to be united, and the *correct ones*,'" I interrupted, peremptorily.

"He gave them, and, lighting a taper, I inserted them in the blanks of the certificate with which I had provided myself before leaving home.

"'Now you can go,' I added, and pointed to the rear door, which led into the church-yard.

"He hesitated, and began to stammer something about some one being very angry at the turn affairs were taking.

"'Enough!' I cried, sternly. 'Do not dare to interfere with me; you can quietly retire and leave things to take their course; or, since I now recognize you as one of the strangers visiting Rye for the summer, I will cause you to be arrested on the morrow for sacrilege, and having tampered with things belonging to the house of God. Hark!' I added, as we heard steps entering the chapel; 'they have come; choose quickly and go; or, if you fear to do that, acknowledge, in the presence of yonder couple, the fraud you were about to commit. I will not have so foul a wrong perpetrated; if a young and trusting maiden believes she is about to become a lawful wife, a wife she *shall* be; I will not allow her to be deceived.'

"A moment longer he hesitated, as if undecided which course to pursue, then, with a terrible imprecation upon me and the whole proceeding, he turned away and glided forth into the darkness, and I saw him no more.

"It was but the work of an instant for me to don the robe and surplice which he had dropped in his fright, and I was at the altar in time to receive the strange couple, one of whom I was now convinced was a designing villain, the other his victim.

"The maiden was apparently very young, and my heart was pained for her; her voice was sweet and childish as she made the responses, and I felt in my soul that she must be motherless, or she would not be there in any such way as that.

"The propriety of my adopting the course I did might be questioned by some, and the thought arise why I did not instead denounce the villain and save the child. I had reasoned all that within myself, and was convinced that if she was so infatuated with her lover that he had won her consent to a secret marriage, it would not be difficult for him to win her again to his will, and, even in the face of my revelation, to do her the foul wrong he had planned.

judged that the greatest kindness I could do her would be to make her really a wife.

"In less than ten minutes the vows which made them one were pronounced, and they were as truly man and wife as any who ever took upon themselves the vows of matrimony; and, putting the certificate of the transaction in the young bride's hand, I saw them go forth into their new life, feeling that whatever happened, I had done what I could.

"I did not believe that with that certificate in her possession, whereon my name was written in my boldest hand, to prove the transaction, that any very great harm could come to that child-wife. I returned to the robing-room, removed my vestures, picked up the wig and beard which still lay there, and brought them home with me as trophies of a strange adventure. They are locked within the third drawer of the old Grafton bureau. God bless and spare that innocent maiden; my heart yearneth over her."

Thus ended the bishop's first entry regarding that strange adventure, and a long, deep sigh, as if some heavy burden had rolled from his heart, burst from Marion Vance's son as he finished reading it and laid down the book.

"Thank God!" he said, devoutly.

"Amen!" murmured the sweet-faced Miss Isabel, who had sat silently watching him as he read, and who seemed to comprehend and sympathize with all that that burst of thanks meant.

"There is something more, I believe, a little farther on," she said, after a moment of silence, and reaching for the book. "Here it is," she added, after turning several pages. "I have read it a great many times, and *hoped* that that young girl might have been happy; and yet I feared for her—there is *so much* that is sad in the world," she concluded, with a sigh.

The excited youth again seized the book eagerly, and read:

"September 10th, 18—. My heart has been unaccountably heavy to-day for that young maiden whom I so strangely wedded about a month ago. Perhaps the event was recalled by my meeting the villain who was to perform the mock ceremony. He avoided me with a blush of shame, turning short in his tracks as he saw me approaching. It is well that he can feel even shame for his sin. But something impressed me that that young wife might some time need even stronger evidence than the certificate I gave her—it might be lost, destroyed, or *stolen*, and then there would be nothing to prove her position if I should die; and so, I resolved to make a record here of their names, and the date of their marriage:

"MARRIED—In St. John's Chapel, Winchelsea, August 11th, 18—, by the Reverend Joshua Grafton, bishop, and rector of St. John's parish, George Sumner, of Rye, to Miss Marion Vance, also of Rye. I take my oath that this is a true statement.

"September 10th, 18—. JOSHUA GRAFTON, Rector."

That was all; but was it not enough?

The book dropped from the youth's nerveless hand, and his involuntary cry smote heavily the heart of the gentle woman sitting so silently in the gathering twilight near him.

"Oh, mother—mother!"

It was as though he could not bear it, and she not there to share it with him—this tardy justice, this blessed revelation. His heart was filled almost to bursting with grief that she should have suffered all those long years, bearing so patiently her burden of shame, when she might even now be living, honored and respected.

She was only thirty-four when she died—just the time when life should have been at its prime.

She was beautiful, and so constituted that she could have enjoyed to their fullest extent all the good things that belonged to her high position in life; and it seemed too cruel, when they might all have been hers—when they *were* hers by right—that she should have been so crushed, and her life so corroded and early destroyed by this foul wrong.

But Marion Vance had learned submission and humility from her life of trial—she had learned to *trust* where the way was so dark that she could not *see*, and she had told her son on her death-bed that notwithstanding she could not fathom the wisdom of the lesson of sorrow that she had had to learn, yet she did not doubt that it would all result for good in the end.

"You may perhaps be a nobler man," she had said, with her hand resting fondly on his chestnut curls, "for having been reared in obscurity, instead of an heir to great possessions; you will, at all events, realize that a noble character is more to be desired than a mere noble-sounding name, and if you should ever rise to eminence by your own efforts, you will not forget the teachings of your mother, and they will help to keep you in the path of rectitude and honor."

He remembered those last words now, and though he was always comforted when he thought of them, yet he could not keep down the wish that she might have lived, and he been

permitted to see her face light up with hope and joy that there was no stain resting upon her or him.

But doubtless she knew it all in Heaven now, and was rejoicing on his account.

He was no longer a nameless outcast from society; he could now hold his head aloft with the proudest in the land—he had no cause for shame, save the knowledge that his father had been one of the vilest villains who walked the face of the earth.

“Where was he now?” he wondered, a hot flush of anger mounting his brow, as it always did when he thought of him.

Was he living or dead?

Dead, he hoped, but that was a thing he had yet to find out.

He wondered how the Marquis of Wycliffe would receive the knowledge that he had gained to-day

He could now seek him and claim his inheritance if he chose—there was no reason why he should not do so, except that his heart shrank with indignation and bitterness from the stern man who, with a face of flint, had sent his mother, a tender, suffering woman, so cruelly into the world to wrestle with life's stern realities, with neither sympathy nor love to smooth its rough way.

He knew that he should claim his inheritance some time; it belonged to him as Marion's legitimate son, and according to the conditions of the old marquis' will.

He would go and rule Wycliffe some day, and show the world how Marion Vance, the despised and scorned, had reared her son. Oh, if she could but have lived to be proud of him and enjoy the good that was coming to him! This was ever the burden of his thought, but it could not be, and he could only strive to remember and follow her pure teachings, and win for himself the respect that had been denied her.

But first he had a work to do. He could not go to Wycliffe yet, much as he desired to re-establish his mother's reputation. He must first find the man who had sought her ruin, to “pass away a summer holiday and to have a jolly good time.” If he were dead he would find his grave and be satisfied. If he was living, he would search until he found him, brand him with his traitorous designs, and prove to him that in his wickedness he had overreached himself.

Then, and not until then, could he present himself before the Marquis of Wycliffe, and demand to be acknowledged as his heir.

CHAPTER XXV

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR

HE did not realize how long he had been sitting there musing over these things until a slight movement of Miss Grafton's aroused him.

"Thank you, and pardon me for my absent-mindedness," he said, starting. "I shall not soon forget your kindness; and may I trespass upon it still further? Will you allow me to make a copy of what I have read?"

"Certainly, if it will be of any benefit to you," Miss Grafton answered, the look of kindly sympathy still on her face.

He noticed it, and, after a moment's thoughtful hesitation, said, with a rising flush:

"This young bride of whom the rector has written was my mother."

"Was?" she repeated in a sad tone.

"Yes, was," he said, with a trembling lip. "She died only a week ago, and I feel that it is due to you, for your kindness to me, that I should tell you this. She believed, and has believed all these long years, that she was most cruelly wronged. She was driven from her beautiful home on account of it, and has suffered in silence ever since. I knew nothing of her sad history, believing my father had died before my birth, until a very short time before her own death. It was true that she had the certificate of which the rector speaks, but that man told her, and she believed, it was a sham and a forgery. Whether he was ever told or discovered that his accomplice was foiled and driven from the field, and a *bona fide* marriage performed, is a mystery; but I am rather inclined to think he did not, since, if he ever discovered my mother's position in life, he would undoubtedly have been anxious to claim her as his wife. She was a lady, and occupied a station in every way honorable before this sad trouble overtook her; and I to-day, with this to prove it, can claim a name as proud as any in England. She was the daughter of the Marquis of Wycliffe, of whom you have doubtless heard."

"Is it possible?" Miss Grafton exclaimed, greatly surprised; "and you are therefore the heir of Wycliffe."

"Yes; but before I present my claim I have a work to do. I must find him who wronged and ruined my mother's life," he returned, with firmly compressed lips and lowering brow.

"Thank you for telling me this," Miss Grafton said, wiping the tears from her eyes. "I have often thought of the young girl, of whom my father used frequently to speak, and wonder if all was well with her. I congratulate you. I am glad that the wrong-doer was outwitted, and that the innocent will be righted at last."

"My poor, innocent mother can never be righted; those years of suffering and humiliation can never be atoned for," the young man said, in trembling tones.

"My friend," Miss Isabel Grafton said, meeting his eyes with a sweet gravity that was all her own, "can you not *trust* that where she has gone all sorrow has ceased, all tears are wiped, and that pain is remembered no more? *She* can see now, if *you* cannot, why all this was permitted."

"Miss Grafton, you remind me of my mother, only you are younger—she used to talk that way to me, and she said almost the same thing to me just before she died," he said, with a touch of reverence in his tones.

Miss Grafton sighed, yet at the same time her lips parted in a little tremulous smile.

The sigh bespoke the memory of some bitter struggle of the past—the smile of the trust and hope of which she had just spoken.

She set before him a pen, ink, and paper, and then quietly left the room while he copied those blessed words from the rector's diary, which in one hour had changed all his life.

Just as he had finished Miss Grafton returned to the parlor, bringing a tempting little lunch for him, and chatted socially with him while he ate it.

When at last he arose to go, bade her farewell, and thanked her again for her kindness, and then went away, she for the first time losing all self-control, threw herself prone upon the floor and cried aloud:

"Another, O Lord! Why in Thy mercy dost Thou permit the brightest hopes to be destroyed, the happiest and most innocent to suffer such cruel blight?"

Thus the story of another sweet woman's life was told.

Isabel Grafton's own youth had been blasted, her own heart crushed and broken by the treachery of one whom she had trusted. She had loved and plighted herself to one who, all unworthy, had deserted her for the brighter smiles of another but the day before he was to have led her to the altar.

* * * * *

The son of Marion Vance went forth upon his self-imposed mission—to find the man who had plotted to betray his

mother, prove to him the validity of his marriage, and then, leaving him forever, return to Wycliffe and claim his inheritance there.

Leaving him thus engaged, we must for a time turn our thoughts in another direction—to Paul Tressalia, who was called from Newport so suddenly, as already mentioned in our story.

It will be remembered that on the same night of his final rejection by Editha Dalton, he had received important letters which demanded his immediate presence abroad, and that summons, with his heart so sore from his disappointment, he was only too glad to obey.

We have already explained how Paul Tressalia was related to the Marquis of Wycliffe, his grandmother being the marquis' only sister, and, should he die without issue, her heirs would inherit the proud name and wealth belonging to him.

When the blow came that destroyed all the marquis' fond hopes, and Marion Vance was driven forth from her home to hide her disgrace, and bring up her illegitimate child far from the immaculate precincts of Wycliffe, little Paul Tressalia, then about six years of age, was at once acknowledged the heir, and from that time educated accordingly.

It was the news of the sudden death of the marquis and of his own succession to his vast property, both in France and England, that had hastened his departure from Newport.

This letter, by some unaccountable means, had been mis-sent, and did not reach him until more than a month after his kinsman's death, and so, without any delay, he hastened to present himself at Wycliffe.

He had never mentioned his prospects to any one during his sojourn in America, where he had tarried longer by a year than he at first intended, on account of his love for Editha. So, although he was reported to be the heir to vast wealth, no one really seemed to know just in what that wealth consisted, or what his future prospects were. He was very modest and unassuming regarding them, preferring to be accepted solely upon his own merits wherever he went, rather than upon the dignity of his prospective grandeur.

He took possession of Wycliffe immediately upon his return to England, and also of all the property belonging to the previous marquis. And yet, in the midst of all his prosperity, he was sad and depressed.

The one woman whom he loved could not share it with him, and all his bright prospects, like the apples of Sodom, turned to ashes in his grasp.

"Oh, my bright Editha!" he moaned, "why could you not have loved me, when I could have given you everything that would make life beautiful to you, when you are so well fitted to grace the position you would have filled as my wife? The beautiful things around me are but mockery—they are nothing to me compared with the boon I crave."

This was his continual cry, and he would shut himself away from every human eye for days, and battle with himself, striving to conquer his hopeless love.

Then it began to be whispered and suggested to him that Wycliffe must have a mistress—he was over thirty, and it was high time that some good, true woman came there to reign, where for so many years there had been no mistress.

"Oh, God!" he cried, after some one had spoken to him of this; "I love but one—I cannot, I *will* not yield her place to another! Must it be—is there no escape?" and his sense of what was right and proper told him that it *ought* to be.

And so several months went by, while all the county yielded him homage, and every matron with a marriageable damsel upon her hands showered upon him every attention that her fertile brains could suggest.

One day he was sitting alone in his library thinking of this—and a magnificent room, be it known, was this library at Wycliffe, furnished with ebony, upholstered in olive, green, and gold. The rich ebony bookcase, inlaid with pearl and precious woods, reached from ceiling to floor, and were filled with countless volumes, each collection bound in uniform covers. It had been the pride of the previous marquis' heart, his one solace and comfort, after his bitter trouble came upon him, and he had spent the greater part of his life there among his choice books.

And it seemed likely also to be the resort of Paul Tressalia, for here he brought himself and his troubles, and, locked within his fort, no one dared to intrude; and, as he sat there one morning thinking bitterly of what might have been, a servant came to the door and knocked for admittance. With a shrug and frown of impatience, he arose and went to the door, where he was handed a card.

It bore the name of a noted lawyer from London—"Archibald Faxon."

"Show him in," the young marquis said, with a weary sigh at being obliged to see any one, and wondering what this noted stranger could want of him.

The Hon. Archibald Faxon soon made his appearance—a wiry, sharp-featured man, with a keen, restless eye that was capable of reading a man through almost instantly

—any one would have known he was a lawyer, and a successful one, too, merely to look at him.

The young marquis greeted him with a show of cordiality, and then politely waited for him to state his business.

He was not long in coming to the point.

"I fear I have come to you upon a very unpleasant errand," he said, suavely, and yet with an appearance of regret in his manner.

"Indeed!" was Paul Tressalia's indifferent reply.

It did not appear to him that anything could move him after what he had already suffered.

"Yes, your lordship; I have to present to you the claims of another to this property of Wycliffe, and all other properties connected with it."

Paul Tressalia regarded the man with almost stupid wonder for a moment. A more ridiculous assertion, it struck him, could not have been made by the most witless fool in the kingdom.

"Sir, I do not understand you," he managed to say, at last.

The noted Mr. Faxon very deliberately and distinctly repeated his statement.

"Are you aware how very absurd such an assertion sounds, Mr. Faxon?" Paul Tressalia asked, with curling lips. "Why, I am the only living representative of the whole family, and what you assert is simply preposterous."

"Not so much so as you may suppose," returned the lawyer, calmly.

Mr. Tressalia began to grow rather red in the face at this; he could not exactly make out whether the lawyer meant to insult him or not; his manner was courteous, but what he said was such an unheard of proposition that he was at a loss to comprehend it.

"If that is the nature of your business with me to-day, you will excuse me if I say I cannot listen to you any further," he said, rather coldly.

"Bear with me, if you please, my lord, for a few moments," returned the imperturbable lawyer, with a wave of his shapely hand, "and allow me to ask you a few questions. Did not the former marquis have an only child?"

"Yes; but she forfeited all claim to the property according to the conditions of the entail, and was disowned by her father more than twenty years ago."

"That child gave birth to a son, I've been told?" remarked Mr. Faxon, not heeding Mr. Tressalia's last statement.

"I really cannot say whether it was a son or daughter,"

he answered, his lips curling again just a trifle. "Whichever it was, it was illegitimate, and could inherit nothing."

"If it had been born in wedlock it would have inherited the property which you now hold, would it not?"

"Yes; but it was *not* born in wedlock, consequently all this argument is utterly useless," the young marquis said, impatiently.

"Are you *quite sure*, my lord, of the truth of what you assert?" was the next unruffled query.

"Certainly; it is according to Miss Vance's own confession to her father; she owned she had been deceived, and that only a mock marriage had been consummated."

"Is it not barely possible that Miss Vance herself may have been mistaken in the matter?"

"I should think *not*, when interests of so vital importance were at stake," Paul Tressalia answered, with something very like a sneer upon his fine face.

The question was so utterly devoid of sense and reason, at least to him, that he could not control it.

"But it is my duty to prove to you that such *was* the case, notwithstanding. May I ask your attention to some documents which I have in my possession?" and the lawyer, with great deference, drew forth a package from his pocket.

With an expression of incredulity upon his handsome face, Paul Tressalia drew up his chair to the table, to comply with his request.

He spread them before him, and immediately entered upon an explanation of their contents, going over them step by step until, in spite of his unbelief, the young marquis' face grew grave, anxious, and perplexed, and he began to fear that his fair inheritance, his proud name and title, were in danger of being wrested from him after all.

He read the certificate signed so boldly by Joshua Grafton, bishop, and rector of St. John's parish, and which had been given to Marion upon the completion of the marriage ceremony, and which also she had regarded only as so much worthless paper; yet some unaccountable instinct had always prevented her destroying it whenever she had been tempted to do so.

He carefully read those extracts which Marion's son had made from the rector's diary, and with which we are so familiar. He listened with painful interest to the repetition of the sexton's story of his confession, and how he became a witness to the marriage ceremony, and he could scarcely credit his own sense of hearing as he heard the

marvelous tale, and his better judgment told him that every word was true.

But when one is already suffering, as he was suffering, with his heart so sore and bitter, one's natural antagonism and rebellion against the iron hand of fate is more easily aroused.

So it was now with Paul Tressalia; he had been obliged to relinquish his dearest hopes—to give up the woman he loved; and now, with this almost incontestable evidence before him, it seemed as if every hope of his manhood was destined to be crushed; and, with a strange perversity, even in the face of such stern facts as had just been presented to him, he said within himself that he *would not yield* his inheritance to this unknown child of Marion Vance—he *would not* give up his position, his wealth, his proud and honored name.

"It is a cunningly devised fable," he said, with a stern, white face, "and I defy the claim."

"I am sorry, my lord; for, with all my experience in the law, I must say I never undertook a clearer case," the Hon. Mr. Faxon replied, with the same unvarying politeness that he had displayed all through the interview.

"Nevertheless, I shall resist to the uttermost of my ability. Tell your client so. He will have to fight a mighty hard battle before he will win one foot of Wycliffe," the young marquis returned, moodily.

"He is prepared to do so, if necessary, your lordship, for his mother's sake alone. He has expressed deep regret at your disappointment, but *her* honor and purity must be established at all events, whether he wins anything else or not. He will at once take measures to establish the validity of her marriage, that all who formerly knew her may know that no shadow of stain rests upon her character."

"Who is he? Where has he been all these years? Where is he now?" demanded the marquis, with clouded brow.

He saw the reasonableness of what the young man contemplated, and knew that if those facts were once established there would be no hope left for him.

"Until about seven years ago he resided with his mother in —, a little town in the southwest of England. After her death, prompted by curiosity, he visited the place where she believed she had been so grossly deceived, and accidentally stumbled upon the evidence with which I have presented you to-day."

"Then his mother knew nothing of all this?—she believed

up to the time of her death that she had forfeited all claim to this property?" Mr. Tressalia inquired, gravely.

"Most assuredly, or she would have returned immediately to her father and vindicated herself, for the sake of her child's future."

"Why did he not present himself to his grandfather, then, as soon as he made this discovery?" the marquis inquired, thinking it very strange that he had not done so.

"His first impulse was to do so. But he is very proud—he inherits all the fire and spirit of his race—and, feeling very sore and indignant at the treatment which his mother received from his grandfather, he naturally shrank from him. Moreover, he concluded that his first duty was to find the man who had so wronged him and her, and notify him of the validity of the marriage which he had supposed to be but a sham."

"Did he succeed?"

"He did not, although he has used every means in his power to discover the man's place of residence, and whether he was living or dead. He would not now present his claim to this property, but recently learning of the death of his grandfather, he deemed it best to establish his identity and continue his search afterward."

"He is rather late in the day; he should have come immediately upon the marquis' death, and before I had taken possession," Paul Tressalia said, with some excitement.

"He would have done so had it been possible; but it is only a fortnight since he learned that fact."

"On your honor as a gentleman, do you believe the statements you have made to me to-day?" the marquis asked, after considering the matter in a long and thoughtful pause, and fixing his eyes keenly upon the lawyer.

"On my honor as a gentleman, and *as a friend* of the previous Marquis of Wycliffe, I have not a single doubt upon the subject."

"These are only copies," Mr. Tressalia said, laying his hand upon the papers before him. "Have you seen the original, written in the hand of Bishop Grafton?"

"I have, and examined them carefully."

"Does his signature there correspond with this upon the certificate of marriage?"

"Exactly; except that this is written in rather a bolder hand. I have also seen the sexton and questioned him closely," Mr. Faxon returned, feeling deeply for the young man, who was to lose so much upon the proof of these facts.

"Where did you say the claimant is at this time?" Paul Tressalia asked.

"Here at Wycliffe, awaiting an interview with yourself. I think you will find him disposed to be very considerate and generous with you in his dealings; and you will acknowledge that, despite the obscurity in which he has been reared, he is an honor to your race. Shall I bring him to you now?" Mr. Faxon asked.

"If you please; I am ready to meet him now," Paul Tressalia said, with a weary sigh.

The lawyer immediately arose and left the room, but returned again almost instantly, accompanied by a tall, handsome stranger, whose peculiarly noble and attractive face at once riveted Paul Tressalia's eye.

"My lord," the Hon Archibald Faxon said, in his most gracious manner, "allow me to present to you my client, who is also your relative, and by the name his mother gave him—*Earle Wayne!*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BATTLE WON

IN the great library at Wycliffe three strongly contrasted men had met to solve one of life's most complex problems.

Paul Tressalia, the present master of Wycliffe, was face to face with the grim possibility of being turned out of his estates.

The Hon. Archibald Faxon, a famous London lawyer, had entered the library a moment before and introduced to the astounded Paul Tressalia a claimant in the shape of a cousin upon whose name had rested the shadow of shame.

But it was not simply this that had driven the blood from Paul Tressalia's face. It was the fact that the lawyer had introduced his client as "*Earle Wayne.*"

"*Earle Wayne!*" repeated Paul Tressalia, in a startled tone, a sharp, sudden pain running throughout his frame at the name as he remembered an interview with pretty Editha Dalton, and instantly knew that his rival for her love, and the claimant for his supposed inheritance, were one and the same person.

Then quickly recovering himself, he greeted his kinsman with the courtesy that always characterized him.

"Yes, sir," explained the lawyer; "every one is aware that the Marquis of Wycliffe possessed another title—Vis-

count Wayne. When Miss Vance—or, I should now more properly say, Mrs. Sumner—left her father's house, under the impression that she had been lured into a mock marriage, she could not endure the thought of retaining the name by which she had always been known, and, feeling utterly unable to renounce *every* tie that bound her to the old life, she adopted the name of Mrs. Wayne as one little likely to attract attention, and, when her son was born, bestowed upon him that of Earle Wayne, and which he always believed belonged to him by right, until his mother lay upon her death-bed."

For the first time in his life Earle Wayne stood in the home of his mother—in the halls of his ancestors.

From what he had learned of Paul Tressalia, he admired and honored him as one of earth's noblest men.

"My lord," he said, as he held him by the hand and courteously addressed him, by the title which more rightly belonged to himself, "I regret more than I can express the necessity that brings me here to-day. Believe me, I care little for the advantages I may reap upon the establishment of my claim compared with the vindication of my innocent mother, who suffered so long in silence and obscurity."

It was frankly spoken, and the regret expressed was real, there could be no doubt of it, while the title he had used did not escape the notice of either the lawyer or Paul Tressalia.

"I can scarcely realize it," the latter said, passing his hand wearily across his brow and speaking with white lips. "Are you the Mr. Wayne who—who——"

"Who for the last seven years has resided in the city of New York, in the United States," Earle hastened to say, to fill up the awkward pause, and knowing but too well of what he was thinking.

He felt deeply for him, and it was a very trying moment for even the noblest nature.

"Yes, yes!" Paul Tressalia said, and then bowed his head upon his breast and sat apparently lost in thought for many minutes.

The Hon. Archibald Faxon regarded them in astonishment. He had not supposed that either knew anything personally of the other until this moment, and never dreamed of the romance so closely woven into their lives.

"Mr. Wayne," Paul Tressalia said at last, lifting his face, which seemed to have grown suddenly old, and turning it full upon Earle, "will you allow me a few hours in which to think this matter over alone before we talk further upon it?"

He was nearly unmanned and crushed beneath this ava-

lanche of stern facts and bitter trouble which had come so suddenly upon him, and he must be alone for awhile, or he knew he should break down utterly.

"Certainly, as long as you like," Earle said, with hearty kindness, adding: "I have no desire to inconvenience you in any way. Take a week, a month, or even longer, if you wish, and I will meet you again at any place and time you see fit to designate."

"Thank you; you are very kind; and if you have no other engagement for to-day, I will give you my decision this afternoon. Meantime, the horses and carriages in the stables are at your service. You can go over the estate, or occupy yourselves in any way agreeable to you," Paul Tressalia replied, with grave courtesy.

He arose, gathered up the papers the lawyer had brought, then, with a bow to both gentlemen, withdrew from the room and sought his private apartments.

Once there, and all doors securely locked, his firmness deserted him utterly.

"*Can I bear it?*" he groaned, sinking into a chair and dropping his head upon the table. "*Can I ever bear it, that she should be his wife? I must, for she loves him, and though to lose her rends my soul, yet I love her so well that to see her happy I would not shrink from any suffering however great. But can I bear to lose all this, and have him here at Wycliffe, where I had hoped to bring her as its mistress and my wife? I cannot bear it!*" he cried aloud, beating the air wildly with his hands, his face convulsed with pain. "I was proud of my inheritance," he went on; "I was proud of my name and position, and hoped to rule wisely and well over the trust committed to my care. *Can I give it up?* I had hoped to make the proud name I bear even more honorable and revered; I had hoped to make it, wherever it was uttered, the synonym for virtue, truth, and probity. Must I surrender all these aspirations, and calmly lay down every ambitious desire. *If I yield, he will marry her at once, and bring her here. She will indeed be mistress of Wycliffe; but, oh! how differently from what I wished! I cannot bear it!*"

He sprang to his feet and paced back and forth, fighting his agony and rebellious heart as only men of his character can fight and suffer.

For more than two hours he argued the case with himself in every possible light, and then, with an expression strong as iron upon his marble face, and eyes that glowed with a relentless purpose, he drew his chair again to the table, sat

down, unfolded the papers he had brought with him, and for another hour studied them intently.

Earle's lawyer—though himself a successful lawyer, he yet deemed that he needed maturer judgment than his own upon this case, and in a strange country, and so had sought one of the best—had prepared a clear and succinct account of Marion Vance's whole history, as related to him by his client, from the time of her leaving her home to visit her friends at Rye, until her death. This, with the certificate of marriage, and the extracts from the old rector's journal, and the sexton's tale, made everything so plain that Paul Tressalia could not doubt the truth of what he read.

He did not for a moment question Earle Wayne's identity, as many might have done, and seize this as a weapon with which to fight him.

That he was the son of Marion Vance seemed to him a self-evident fact. He resembled the former marquis in form, in his proud bearing, his clear-cut, Roman features, his grand and noble head.

Marion had resembled her mother, but the blood of the Vance race showed itself clearly enough in Earle, and Paul had recognized it at once upon beholding him.

The only point he had been at all inclined to doubt was the validity of the marriage.

But this point was established now, if the lawyer's statement was correct, and the extracts *bona fide*; and that could be easily ascertained by comparing the signatures upon the certificate with the writing in the rector's diary.

"I shall go and read that account for myself, and if all this is true, what shall I do?" the sorely-tried man asked himself for the hundredth time.

And then, as his mind leaped forward into the future again, and he saw Earle established in the halls of his ancestors, proud, prosperous, and happy, with Editha Dalton as his wife, and sunny-haired, merry-hearted children playing about them, he covered his face, and writhing with pain, groaned again. Then a miserable temptation beset him; his rebellious heart refusing to bear patiently the crushing burdens imposed upon it.

"Possession is nine points in law—hold on to the Wycliffe estates with a grasp of iron as long as your strength holds out—defy this new and hitherto unknown claimant until the very last," whispered the evil spirit within him.

"What good would it do? He must win in the end," he opposed.

"But you can keep him out of it for years, perhaps, and

all the while enjoy the luxuries you have so fondly believed your own. He has won *her* love away from you; it is not fair that he should have everything and you nothing."

"There is no true love without sacrifice," came to him as if softly wafted upon the breath of some good angel. "If you truly love Editha Dalton—if it is a pure and unselfish love, you will do *right* and let her be happy, no matter what the cost is to yourself. Would she respect you? Would she honor you? Would she be proud to call you friend, as she once said, if, convinced of the right, you wilfully do wrong?"

"No," he said, with uplifted head, and speaking aloud, as if some one had spoken directly to him; "*I'll keep my manhood pure, even though I am beggared by the result*"

A noble spirit of self-abnegation and sacrifice arose within him; the battle was won, but his heart was broken.

Editha Dalton should spend her life without a shadow to mar its brightness, as far as it lay within his power to contribute to that result; and Earle Wayne—a true and noble man he believed him to be, and every way worthy of her priceless love—should have his own without contention.

"Wycliffe will have a noble master," he murmured; "he will add brightness and honor to the name—perhaps more than I could have done. I will try to bear it patiently; I will give her my blessing with my inheritance, and then, when I come to the crossing 'twixt earth and the great beyond, I can pass over without a regret. I shall have done right and what was my duty."

He sighed heavily and threw himself upon a couch, as if exhausted with the struggle; and the good angels watching him must have come to comfort him, for almost unconsciously his eyes closed, and sleep wrapped him for the time in the mantle of forgetfulness.

Did they whisper to him that almost divine message from some sweet, mystic pen:

"Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong?"

He had ordered dinner to be served at three o'clock. A little before that time he awoke, and went down to his guests the calm, self-contained, courteous host.

The dinner-hour passed pleasantly and socially, the three gentlemen conversing unreservedly upon the topics of the day.

When at length they arose from the table, Paul Tressalia requested a few minutes' private conversation with Earle.

It was cordially granted, and they repaired to the library again, while the Hon. Archibald Faxon lingered upon the dining-room balcony smoking his fragrant Havana.

There was a moment's awkward silence as those two claimants of the Wycliffe property stood facing each other; then Paul Tressalia frankly extended his hand, which Earle cordially grasped.

"It is not often that rivals, such as you and I are *in every sense of the word*, can shake hands thus," said the former, with a smile. "I will confess to you that I have had a bitter struggle with my own heart during the last few hours, but I have conquered myself. I am obliged to be convinced of the truth of the evidence you have brought me to-day, and, looking in your face, which unmistakably proclaims your relationship to the late marquis, I know that you are nearer of kin to him than I. Of course, I shall take pains to ascertain everything regarding the rector's story for myself, and that the signatures are all right, and so forth. If there is nothing there to contradict your statements, I shall at once yield my position here, and you will henceforth be recognized as the Marquis of Wycliffe and Viscount Wayne."

Earle could scarcely credit his sense of hearing as he listened to this noble renunciation of all the brightest prospects of his life.

He had believed that he should be obliged to have recourse to the extent of the law in order to establish his claim, and now its possessor was giving up everything without a demur. He could only look the astonishment that he could not speak. Again Paul Tressalia smiled—a smile that was sadder than tears.

"You look surprised at my decision," he said; "you expected I would resist your claim. I suppose I might, if I were so disposed, and thus make you much trouble; but that would not be right, convinced as I am that you are what you say—the legitimate son of Marion Vance and George Sumner; and for the sake of one whom we both love—you fortunately, I most unfortunately—I will not place one obstacle in your path."

Earle was deeply moved by his kinsman's manliness, and touched by his confession of his hopeless love for Editha. Still clasping the hand that had been extended so frankly to him, he said, in a voice that was not quite steady:

"With such a spirit as that, *you* should be master here

at Wycliffe, and not I. It seems to me unjust that your whole life should be destroyed thus, and mine built up out of its ruins. If it were possible for me to share my inheritance with you equally, I would gladly do it; but I suppose the entail forbids that."

"Yes, it could not be, even if I were willing to accept such an obligation," Paul Tressalia said, not unkindly, yet with a little show of spirit.

Earle regarded him with admiration.

"I have heard of you before—how true and good you are, and I am proud to know that I have *one* such relative in the world. If you cannot accept any aid from me, will you not stay with me as my adviser, my elder brother, my friend?" he said, in low, earnest tones.

But Tressalia shook his head, a look of pain leaping to his eyes.

"I fear that would not be possible," he said; "your own heart will tell you that I could not remain here after—after you come here permanently."

Earle saw that it could not be, and sighed. He longed to comfort him, but what could he say?

Delicacy forbade his expressing any pity for his suffering and loss, for that would be but vaunting his own happiness and prosperity.

"We can be friends, can we not?" he asked wistfully.

"Most assuredly. I shall be glad to claim your friendship, and will aid you in everything as far as I am able; believe me, I bear you no ill-will because brighter stars beam upon your way than upon mine just now. You have suffered in the past and borne it like a hero, and I am truly glad that your future is so promising.

Tears stood in Earle's eyes as he said, with a burst of enthusiasm:

"Paul Tressalia, *you* are a hero! You make me think of those lines by Joseph Addison:

'Unbounded courage and compassion joined,
Tempering each other in the victor's mind,
Alternately proclaim him good and great,
And make the hero and the man complete.'"

"You make me out greater than I am," was the sad reply, as he remembered the terrible thoughts and temptations that had come to him a few hours before. "I cannot deny," he continued, after a slight pause, "that I am bitterly disappointed—that it is a trial almost greater than I can bear to

lose all I had so firmly believed to be mine—that I had grown up from youth believing *would* be mine! and had I the least idea now that your claim was invalid, I should do battle valiantly before I would yield up one foot of my possessions to you. Human nature will assert itself, you know, and I am conscious that I am not above its weaknesses. But, Earle, I mean to fight them down until, with the last one under my heel, I shall be able at length to cheerfully contemplate God's richest blessings abiding on you and—yours."

The last word was spoken in a hoarse whisper, and his companion realized that all the force of a mighty will had been employed to let him know how entirely he relinquished everything and acknowledged his superior claim, even to Editha Dalton's love.

Paul Tressalia could bear no more, and, wringing Earle's hand, he went quickly away, leaving him alone and deeply moved.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SEARCH FOR EDITHA

THREE months later saw Earle Wayne firmly established as the master of Wycliffe, and over all other property belonging to the former Marquis of Wycliffe and Viscount Wayne. His mother's character was cleared of every imputation of evil, her body removed to the vaults of her ancestors, where it rested as peacefully and quietly as the noblest of all the race of Vance, and the friends of her youth now looked back with sadness and regret upon the sufferings of the beautiful injured girl, which their own sneers and coldness had helped to aggravate.

All this change made no small stir in the social world.

Paul Tressalia first of all went down to Winchelsea, where he interviewed the old sexton of St. John's Chapel, who told him exactly the same story that he had told Earle seven years before. He next sought Miss Isabel Grafton, and craved permission to peruse her father's diary.

She received him with the same graciousness that she had accorded Earle, and talked long and freely with him upon the strange, sad events of Marion Vance's history, while he in return related much regarding Earle's manly battling with the cold world, omitting, of course, that sad epoch wherein he, too, had suffered so much for another's wrong.

In a simple, manly fashion he mentioned the fact that the establishment of his young kinsman's identity dethroned him from Wycliffe and one of the proudest positions in England, and Miss Grafton's expressions of sincere regret and sympathy were the sweetest and most comforting sounds that had fallen on his ear since that night when Editha Dalton had crushed his last hope of ever winning her love.

He was convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that Earle was the rightful heir, and he gave up everything to his possession without a demur; and then, out of the nobility of his nature, took upon himself the defense of Marion Vance's character.

He caused a notice of the marriage to be inserted in all the leading papers, with the date of the event, wrote a brief and simple account of the manner in which it had occurred, the wrong that had been attempted but fortunately outwitted, and how at last the real heir, her son, had been restored to his rights.

It was not long after this before the whole world—Marion's world—knew of her innocence, and immediately recognized and cordially received Earle as Marquis of Wycliffe and Viscount Wayne.

This accomplished, Earle's impatient heart told him he now might return to Editha and claim the reward of all his patient waiting, and to make one last effort to discover the criminals for whom he had so unjustly suffered.

He did not dream that when he should inform Mr. Dalton of the great change in his prospects, and the position to which he had attained, he would longer withhold his consent to his marriage with his daughter; and so it was with a light heart that he left Paul Tressalia to rule at Wycliffe until his return, and set sail for the United States.

The "wings of the wind" were not half rapid enough to bear him thither, for, for several weeks past, his heart had been filled with great anxiety.

Editha's letters had suddenly ceased, and though he wrote again and again, it was ever with the same result—not one came in reply.

He did not for a moment doubt her constancy; he knew she simply *could not* be untrue to him, and he was forced to believe that Mr Dalton had discovered the fact of their correspondence, and had taken measures to stop it, in perhaps the same way that he had before intercepted her flowers.

The passage across the Atlantic was an unusually long one, owing to unfavorable winds and storms, and he was nearly sick with the delay and his patience exhausted, when at last

the vessel touched her pier, and he sprang ashore like a restless bird escaped from its cage.

Two hours later he stood on the steps of Mr. Dalton's residence, his heart beating with a strange, unaccountable fear of something wrong, though he knew not what.

A servant answered his impatient ring, and to his eager inquiry, "Is Miss Dalton at home?" returned a surprised "No, sir."

He then inquired for Mr. Dalton, and the reply suddenly stilled his rapid heart-beats and drove every shade of color from his face and lips.

"No, sir, Mr. Dalton is not at home; he has been searching for Miss Dalton ever since her strange disappearance," the man said.

"*Strange disappearance!* Man! what do you mean?" gasped Earle, actually staggering beneath the unexpected blow.

The servant, pitying his distress, asked him to come in, saying he would tell him all about the affair.

He mechanically obeyed, and his heart nearly died within him as he listened to the strange account of her sudden disappearance and protracted absence.

Nothing had been heard of her during all that time beyond what has already been related in a previous chapter, although every one reasoned, from the account which the policeman gave of her encounter with the ruffian on her return from John Loker's house, that *he* must have had something to do with it, since she seemed to possess something that he was bound to have, and she as determined not to relinquish.

The detectives employed to unravel the mystery could learn nothing; they were baffled at every point. They would seem to gain a clew to her whereabouts, and then would suddenly lose it again.

Her fate remained a dark and perplexing mystery, and seemed likely to remain so indefinitely, and it had created a great deal of excitement, not only in her own city but all over the State.

At first Earle inclined to think that Mr. Dalton himself was criminally concerned in the affair, remembering as he did his excessive anger upon discovering that Editha had promised to be his wife, and also his insulting language, sneers, and sarcasm both to her and him the day before his departure for Europe.

But after he had seen and conversed with Mr. Felton, Editha's lawyer, he changed his mind upon this point.

Mr. Felton asserted that Mr. Dalton was now traveling in search of her, and had been unwearied in his efforts to find her ever since her disappearance.

He privately informed him also that his business affairs were inextricably involved, and that for a long time he had been dependent upon Editha's income, which she had freely and generously shared with him.

Now, however, since she was of age and controlled her property, he would be cut off from that source of supply until she was found, as Mr. Felton had no right to pay over anything to him without her sanction; so it was for his interest that he exert every effort in his power to find her.

Earle's every interest and thought for himself was now also swallowed up in this great and unexpected trouble.

He no longer thought of seeking those unpunished criminals, or of clearing his own name from dishonor.

What cared he for any disgrace that might cling to *him*, so long as *her* fate remained such a dark mystery, and she, perhaps, sick and suffering, or—dead, for all any one would ever know?

For a week he was nearly mad, neither eating nor sleeping, but wandering aimlessly about the streets, peering into every face he met, as if he hoped that by some chance he might meet her. At night he was like some restless, caged lion, helplessly shut in by the darkness, as it were, behind its bars, against which he constantly fretted and fumed, until, with the first sign of dawn, he could return to his vain search.

But at the end of a week he began to realize the uselessness of his present course and then determined to settle down to some methodical plan upon which to work.

He resolved that he would visit every town, village and hamlet in the State, and that failing, he would search every other State in the Union in the same way.

Of course, this would entail upon him a life-long search, and the detectives told him he would only have his labor for his pains—that he would never find her in that way. They held to the belief that she was either in that city, or else in one of the adjoining cities, and within easy reach of the great metropolis, and they declared that they should confine their efforts to those places.

Earle wrote something of all this to Paul Tressalia, begging him to remain and rule at Wycliffe until his return, even though it should not be for a long time, and then he began his weary search.

It would be wearisome in the extreme to follow him, step by step, through the long weeks that followed, and during

which he spared neither himself nor his money. He grew pale, thin and nervous, and disheartened, too, as the time went by, and he seemed no nearer the accomplishment of his object than at the very first.

"What shall I do?" he wrote, almost in despair, to Mr. Felton from a distant town. "I am nearly distracted, for all my efforts are vain. I have interviewed a number of detectives in different cities, and no two advise the same mode of procedure, and have advanced so many plans and theories that I am like a ship far out at sea, without either rudder or sail. I suffer continually the tortures of the rack. There is no rest for me, and there will be no charm in life for me until I find my lost one. Can you give me any hope? Has any clew been discovered? Telegraph me instantly if there is a single ray of hope."

"Poor fellow!" the lawyer sighed, as he folded the letter after reading it; "it is a hard case. It is a most *trying* case, and no one can tell how it will end," he mused, "else, with her resolution and natural keenness, it seems as if she must have found some way of giving us a hint of her whereabouts if she is detained anywhere against her will."

But he could only telegraph to Earle: "No clew has yet been discovered."

And the weary lover resumed his sad quest by himself.

But poor, frail humanity cannot endure everything; there is a point beyond which tired nature refuses to go, and at last, worn almost to a shadow, Earle felt that he must do something to recruit his strength, or he would give out entirely. A fever seemed to be burning in his veins, drying his blood and parching his skin; his appetite failed him, his strength was leaving him, and he grew so nervous and irritable that the slightest noise startled him painfully, the least opposition or disappointment tried him almost beyond endurance.

"I am going to be sick," he said one day, when he was nearly prostrated, and looking at his thin, trembling hands. "This anxiety and ceaseless search are fast wearing me out. I must rest, or I shall die, and who then will find my Editha?"

Longing for the sight of some familiar face, and hoping that Mr. Felton might by this time be able to give him a "drop of comfort," he returned with all speed to the city whence he had started.

Arriving in the evening, some unaccountable repugnance to repairing to the hotel where he usually stopped, and where he had before spent so many restless, miserable nights, seized him, and calling a coach, he gave the name of a

smaller, but no less respectable house, located in a quiet street, and was driven thither.

He sought the clerk and asked for a room.

As it happened, the hotel that week was overflowing with transient visitors, and at first the clerk told him that there was not a room to be had in the house.

"You must manage some way to accommodate me, for I am too weary and ill to move another step," Earle said; and indeed his looks did not belie his words.

The clerk went to consult with one of the proprietors, and then returned, saying they would give him a room in which to sleep that night, if he did not mind a little noise now and then, and by another day there would probably be better accommodations for him.

"I shall mind nothing, so that I can have a bed on which to rest," the tired traveler said, much relieved by the intelligence.

"I shall have to give you one of a suite of rooms hired by a lady and her daughter. It is reserved for her son, who occasionally visits her and remains over night. He went away this morning, and, as he probably will not be here to-night, you can have that room," explained the clerk.

"Will not the madam object?" Earle asked, instinctively recoiling from the idea of in any way incommoding a lady.

"Oh, no; we have done the same thing, with her consent, once or twice before, when the house has been full," was the confident and reassuring reply.

"All right; I am ready to occupy it at once," Earle said, rising, and anxious to be at rest.

The clerk hesitated before leading the way.

"I ought perhaps to tell you, sir," he began, "that madam's daughter is an invalid—she is a little cracked," he added, touching his forehead significantly, "and sometimes takes on a little during the night. I thought you ought to be told this, so that if you were disturbed you might know the cause and not be alarmed."

"The door between the rooms can be locked, of course?" Earle asked.

"Oh, yes; madam keeps it locked on her side, and there is also a bolt upon the other side. The young lady is perfectly harmless, only her brother informed me that when the spells come upon her she moans constantly, as if in distress, and they come on mostly in the night. She may not disturb you at all, however."

"I shall not mind it, now that you have told me this; it

might have disturbed me otherwise," Earle answered, as he wearily turned to follow his guide.

Taking the elevator, they were borne into the fourth story, and he was shown into a room at the top of the house.

It was a long, rather narrow room, comfortably furnished, and having two doors to it, one leading into the hall, the other into the room adjoining. There was a transom over both doors, and through the one leading into the others of the suite Earle could see a dim light, but all was perfectly quiet within.

He looked to see that the bolt was perfectly fast in its socket, and then, giving his neighbors no further thought, he hastily disrobed, and, wearied out, crept into bed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EARLE WAYNE'S BOLD VENTURE

He almost instantly fell into a profound and dreamless slumber.

How long he slept thus he could not have told, but he was suddenly awakened during the night by a low, sobbing noise proceeding from the room on his right.

Arousing so suddenly, and being consequently somewhat confused, it seemed to him at first as if some one had called his name.

He sat erect in bed and listened.

All was silence for a few moments, then he heard the tones of a man speaking as if in anger, and the same low sobbing instantly began again, while a sweet voice seemed pleading for something.

Then he heard the man's voice somewhat louder, and speaking impatiently, as if he had commanded some one to do something, and had not been obeyed.

It was followed, as before, by the low sobbing, and a faint, heart-broken moaning that made Earle Wayne feel very strangely.

"There is something wrong going on in there," he muttered to himself. "The clerk said the man would not return here to-night; but it seems he has, and I don't like the sound of things at all."

He arose and went softly to the door which led into the other apartment.

It was a very thick, solid door, and prevented his hearing distinctly anything that was said.

He bent his head to the keyhole, but even then could only catch the sound of a man and woman conversing in low tones, without distinguishing a word.

The sobbing had ceased for the moment, but, at a question apparently addressed to a third party, it immediately began again.

A cold sweat gathered upon Earle Wayne's forehead.

The sounds affected him as he had never been affected before. He longed to know what piece of wickedness—for wickedness he was convinced it was—was being enacted within those walls at that time of night.

A faint light from the other room shone into his through the transom, so that he could distinguish every object in it. He glanced up at the light, a sudden thought striking him.

The transom, of course, was glazed, and he had no doubt that it was fastened upon the other side, but possibly he might hear a little more distinctly if he could get up to it, and it would do no harm for him to investigate and see if it was fastened.

He brought the center-table and put it softly down by the door. He then took a blanket from his bed and covered the marble top, set a chair upon this, and then noiselessly mounting upon that by the aid of another, he found himself upon a level with the transom.

To his intense satisfaction, he discovered that it was not fastened; it was tightly closed, but it yielded beneath his cautious touch, and he knew if he could open it ever so little without attracting the attention of the occupants of that room, he could satisfy himself regarding the nature of the proceedings there.

While he stood there waiting for a favorable opportunity to push the transom open, a neighboring clock struck the hour of two.

"Unless the young lady has been taken suddenly sick, I am satisfied that mischief of some kind is brewing," he said to himself, and resolving not to leave his post until he had ascertained whether he was right or not.

He found he could hear more plainly now—could catch a word occasionally, though not enough to give him any idea of the nature of the conversation carried on there.

As soon as he heard that low sobbing again he gently tried to move the transom still more.

It yielded a trifle, but grated a little on the wood work.

He waited a moment, and then made another effort, and it moved just enough to admit a line of light at the bottom. Then he could hear quite plainly.

A man seemed to be asking the strangest questions of some one.

"Your name is Ellen Wood?" he heard him say, in a mocking tone.

"Yes, Ellen Wood," came the reply, in a plaintive voice that made Earle's hair at once stand on end.

"You are *sure* your name is Ellen Wood?"

"Yes, Ellen Wood," in the same tone as before.

"Where were you born?"

"In Texas"

"Who is your father?"

"Judge Allen Wood."

"Where is he now?"

"He is dead."

"Who is this woman?"

"She is my—mother," with a shuddering accent on the last word.

"And I am your brother, am I not?"

"N-n-o, oh!" a gasping voice uttered, with a moan between each word.

"You ain't over fond of me, I see," the man returned, with a low, mocking laugh. "You've got your lesson pretty well learned, though, and if any one should ask you any questions to-morrow when you go out to take the air—as you must do for the sake of your health—you'll know how to answer them. Now take that ring from your finger and give it to me," he commanded, sternly.

"I can't, I can't!" moaned the plaintive voice.

"Curse your obstinacy and my lack of power!" he growled.

"Now tell me where that paper is—quick!"

"No, no, no! no, no, no!"

And immediately the sobbing and moaning were resumed, but in a way that seemed to show that the speaker's strength was almost exhausted.

The man swore a fearful oath, and then Earle heard another voice—a woman's—say:

"It's of no use, Tom—your power is not strong enough to make her tell that, and you are wearing her out; she can't stand this kind of thing much longer."

"I'll never let her go until she does tell me," he answered, fiercely, with another oath. "If I was sure," he added, "that it was hid in that house, I'd go and burn it down to-night, and then let her go. I'm sick and tired of the whole thing."

"Better let her go anyway, and run the risk," said his companion; "you will soon kill her at this rate."

"Dead men tell no tales," he answered, moodily; "but the risk is too great, for if that paper contains a description of me, I'm a marked man as long as I live."

Earle now ventured to push the transom a little more.

It was clear of the wood-work, now, and swung quite easily and noiselessly, so that he could get a good view of the room, and he saw a sight that made his heart stand still with horror, while an almost superhuman effort alone prevented a sharp cry of agony escaping his lips.

Upon a bed in the corner opposite him lay Editha Dalton. She was as white as the counterpane covering her, and wasted to a mere skeleton.

She was sobbing in a nervous, excited way, her thin white hands clasped upon her heaving breast, her eyes wild and staring, and fixed in a fascinated gaze upon a burly, repulsive-looking man, who stood by the bedside scowling fiercely upon her.

By his side there also stood a nicely dressed, rather prepossessing woman of about fifty-five.

Their backs were toward the door where Earle was stationed, consequently they had seen nothing of the almost noiseless movement of that transom behind them.

It took all the force of Earle's will to control his intense excitement as he looked upon the scene just described.

Never in his life had he felt so dizzy and faint as he did at that moment, while a weakening, sickening tremor pervaded every nerve in his body.

"Better let her alone now, Tom, and don't come here again for a week. Let her get a little strength before you exert your power over her again," the woman said in reply to the man's last observation.

"The weaker she is the less will she will have," he muttered.

"Her will is so strong that you will never move her to tell what you want to know; and you do not want to kill her, I know."

"No," he admitted, with a scowl.

"She will do almost anything you tell her, except to reveal what will injure that one person; that seems to be an instinct which nothing can conquer, and your magnetic force is not sufficient to overcome it."

"You do not need to tell me that," he growled.

"Well, I want you to let her alone for awhile; I don't

want her dying on *my* hands," returned the woman, with decision.

The ill-looking man did not reply, but made a few passes over Editha's head and face, touching her on the forehead and in the region of the epigastrium.

Almost instantly the wild look faded from her eyes, her clasped hands dropped apart, and fell limp and nerveless upon the counterpane, while she lay panting and exhausted, but looking much more natural to Earle than she had done a moment before with that strained look on her face.

The woman came forward, gently raised her head, and held a bowl to her lips, from which she drank eagerly, and seemed much refreshed.

Once more the villain turned toward her, and said, with sullen ferocity:

"Well, my plucky fine lady, how much longer do you suppose you can stand this kind of thing?"

Editha made no reply, but her eyes, which seemed unnaturally large, now that she was so thin, gleamed defiance at him.

"You are getting weaker every day, and you're getting so pale and poor that that fine young chap you're so fond of would not know you if he should see you now," he continued, heartlessly.

A look of inexpressible sadness settled upon the fair face, the white lids quivered a moment and then drooped over the blue yes, and the pale lips trembled painfully; but she made no other sign of her suffering, uttered no word to his cruel taunt.

Her silence exasperated him, and, leaning down so that his face came almost on a level with hers, he hissed:

"You *shall* tell me where that paper is, or you shall never see the outside of these walls again. Do you hear?"

"I will *never* tell you," she now said, in a weak voice, but with a firmness that made another fierce oath leap to his lips, and sent a shudder through her slight frame.

Earle ground his teeth, but waited to hear no more.

He noiselessly descended from his perch, dressed himself with all possible dispatch, all excepting his boots; then quietly unlocking his door, opened it a crack, and stood there in the dark waiting.

His mind was made up to do a bold thing.

His weariness and illness were all forgotten; his nerves were steady and quiet, and the strength of a Samson seemed quivering in every muscle.

He waited perhaps fifteen minutes, when he heard the key turn in the door of the room on his right.

Another moment and the wretch whom he had seen there came forth and took a preliminary survey of the hall before proceeding further.

How he expected to get out of the hotel at that hour of the night without being discovered, particularly when he had three flights of stairs and as many halls to traverse, was a point Earle did not allow himself time to consider.

The man, apparently satisfied that there was nothing to impede his progress, glided velvet-shod over the soft carpet.

Earle allowed him to get well past his door, then, stealing out without a sound, he crept up behind him and hit out square from his shoulder a tremendous blow, which taking his prey just behind the ear, doubled him up in an instant.

He caught him in his arms before he could fall to the floor, for he had no desire to make any disturbance at that hour of the night, and then by main strength half carried, half dragged him back into the room he had occupied, laid him upon the floor, and locked him in.

Not a sleeper had been aroused.

The blow he had dealt was quick and powerful, but not loud enough to awaken any one from a sound slumber, though it had rendered his victim unconscious for the time, and the noise of dragging him the short distance to his room had not disturbed any one.

The next thing was to get inside that other room without creating any confusion.

He knew that his captive was only stunned, and would doubtless soon recover from the effects of the blow he had given him; but locked within that room, he knew he could not escape for he was in the fourth story, and could not, of course, make his way out by the window.

He did not think, either, that he would make any noise upon returning to his senses, for he would be sure to bring upon himself deeper trouble if he did so.

He stood and listened a moment or two outside the door of the room where Editha lay, thinking that something of the disturbance must have reached its occupants, since both were awake, and the affair had occurred so near to them.

He hoped the attendant would come to the door and look out to see what was the trouble, when he would easily be able to get inside, and into Editha's presence, without using any forcible means.

If her attendant had not been attracted, and she did not come, he had resolved to knock gently for admittance. Even

then he feared he should not gain it, since he surmised, and correctly, too, that the man must have some signal by which his presence could be known from that of any one else.

Earle's conjectures, however, proved correct. Editha's attendant had heard a slight noise in the hall and been startled by it.

"Did you hear anything?" she asked, turning to the girl on the bed.

"No, nothing," she answered, wearily.

"Something has happened, I fear," she said to herself, and then going to the door, bent her head to listen, an expression of great anxiety on her face.

She could hear nothing, however; but apparently not quite satisfied, she ventured to unlock the door and peer forth into the hall. This was Earle Wayne's opportunity.

With noiseless tread he stepped quickly up to her, and, before she was hardly aware of his intention, pushed the door open, forced her back into the room, and entered himself.

Another instant and the door was again shut, locked, and the key in his pocket.

His next movement was to see if the door leading into that other room was locked also.

It proved to be, but the key was in the lock, and he pocketed this, too, thus gaining all the power he wanted for the present.

The whole transaction had not occupied above six or seven minutes, nor had a word been spoken; but Earle had done a good thing, for in that time he had captured single-handed, one of the most successful robbers in the United States, as well as his accomplice, and doubtless had saved the girl he loved from even greater sufferings than she had already experienced.

With this accomplished, and both keys in his pocket, he now turned his attention to the occupant of the bed.

But Editha had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MISSING PAPER

"How dare you enter this room at such an hour?" demanded the woman in attendance, who, after the first shock had passed, quickly recovered herself and was now prepared to do battle.

"We will have no words upon the subject just now. if you please—it is one that will keep, for awhile, at least; get restoratives and revive this fainting girl without delay," Earle commanded, in quiet though stern tones, and then bent anxiously over his unconscious loved one.

The woman, cowed by his authoritative manner, proceeded to attend Editha at once, although it was with a face nearly as white as the waxen one upon the pillow. With a sinking heart Earle stood by jealously watching her every movement.

Editha, his darling, his promised wife, lay there looking more like a beautiful piece of sculpture than like a human being who would ever breathe or speak again, and a great fear took possession of him that she never would recover. But the woman was evidently a good nurse, and, under the influence of the restoratives she was using, Editha soon gave signs of returning life.

When she at last opened her eyes, Earle was sitting by her side, and smiled upon her as she looked at him, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for him to be there.

Yet he actually held his breath, fearing that the shock of his presence might make her swoon again.

"Earle!" she breathed, a look of awe stealing over her countenance.

The look told him that for the moment she believed herself dead, and to have met him in another world.

"Yes, my darling, Earle, and no one else," he said, softly, bending down and touching her forehead with his lips. That caress brought her more to herself. A wave of gladness swept over her face, her eyes lighted with a beautiful and almost holy look of love, then, with a sigh that seemed to throw off all its burdens and fear, every feature settled into restfulness and peace.

"I am so glad!" was all she could say, and that in a voice too weak for anything but a whisper.

He could have bowed his head and wept over her to find her thus, all her bright beauty faded, her strength nearly spent, almost dying, he feared.

But he knew he must control himself and minister to her, if he would save her.

"Have you anything that will give her strength?" he asked, turning to her attendant.

"Yes; there are wines and liquors in the cabinet, and beef-tea warm upon the gas-stove in the bath-room."

Earle had convinced himself with a glance before this that

there was only one door to the bath-room, and he now commanded her to bring some of the beef-tea.

She brought it almost immediately.

"Taste it yourself first," he said, curtly.

"You need not fear for her—I have no desire to have the life of *any* one to answer for," she said scornfully, and flushing.

"Drink some of it," he persisted.

He would not trust her, and she swallowed a mouthful unhesitatingly.

He then slipped his arm gently under Editha's pillow, and lifted her until she could lean comfortably against his shoulder.

"Drink this now, dear, for my sake," he said, putting the bowl to her lips.

Without a question she obeyed, drinking slowly until the last drop had disappeared, and Earle's heart began to grow lighter.

If she would do that often she would soon be better, he thought.

"That will give you strength," he said; "now lie down and try to sleep. I shall not leave you again to-night, and when you are refreshed I will let you talk with me a little."

He laid her gently back, stopping to kiss her almost hueless lips as he did so.

She put one hand up over the back of his neck and held him a moment so, his face almost touching hers.

"You have saved me, Earle," she said, feebly.

"I trust so, my injured darling," he answered, with unsteady voice, and then watched her while the tired eyes closed; the wan face settled into peace, and she slept like a weary child.

Then he turned his attention to the woman, who had watched him with wondering eyes all the while.

Pointing to a lounge on the opposite side of the room, he said:

"Madam, if you are weary you can lie down there until morning. I shall take charge of your patient henceforth."

"By what right?" she demanded, bridling.

"The right of her promised husband," he answered, sternly.

The woman started violently, searched his face a moment, her own growing very pale again.

"Are you——" she began, but her lips refused to complete the sentence.

"My name is Earle Wayne. Doubtless you have heard it

before, and now surmised as much," he said, not pitying her agitation in the least.

"I do not believe it," she at last said, in a low, angry tone, while at the same time she stealthily moved in the direction of the bell-pull.

Earle marked the movement.

"You will please sit over there," he said, quietly, and pointing to the lounge. "I am not in need of any assistance at present, and can summon it myself if I think it necessary. It will be wiser for you to comply with my request," he added, sternly, as she hesitated. "If you make any disturbance, I will have you lodged in a station-house in less than half an hour."

The woman cowed at once at this, and retreated in sullen silence to the lounge, where, settling herself comfortably, she did not move again, while Earle for the next two hours kept his vigil by Editha's bedside, where she slept quietly, sweetly, and refreshingly.

While she is thus sleeping we will take a bird's-eye view of the time that had elapsed since her encounter with Tom Drake, after leaving John Loker's house, and from which she was rescued by the sturdy policeman, only to fall into still deeper trouble.

It will be remembered that after she had taken tea with her father she repaired to her own room, where she made a careful copy of John Loker's confession, and then hid the original, with his signature attached, beneath the cushion of her jewel-box. She then inclosed the copy in an envelope addressed to Earle, and proceeded to write a long letter to him, recounting her adventures of the evening.

Her father had gone out immediately after supper, the servants were all abed in their rooms, and she was entirely alone in the front portion of the house.

It had taken her so long to make a copy of the confession that she was not half through with her letter when the cathedral clock near by struck the hour of eleven.

Almost simultaneously with its last stroke the door of her room swung noiselessly open, and a fierce, ugly face, half shaded by a slouch hat, appeared in the aperture. A moment after the figure of a man entered, the door was softly closed, and he advanced with a stealthy, cat-like tread to where the young girl, who was deeply engaged in writing to her lover, sat bending over her writing-desk. She was not conscious of the presence of the intruder until, reaching for a new pen, she chanced to raise her eyes, and saw him standing close by her side.

A cry of fright parted her lips as she instantly recognized the repulsive features and burly form of Tom Drake. Without giving her time to repeat her cry, he clapped his hand over her mouth in the same way he had done earlier in the evening.

"Ah, ha! my plucky jade, did you think I would tamely give up the chase?" he asked, with a horrible leer. "Not so, my pretty," he continued; "there is altogether too much at stake for that. But I can't stand here to hold you—will you promise to keep still if I'll take my hand from your mouth? You'd better, or I——"

He stopped short, with a fierce look that frightened her excessively.

"The old man is out," he went on, as she did not make any sign of promise. "I've been watching around all the evening—came directly here after I was obliged to leave you so abruptly—ha, ha! and I saw him make for the theater; he probably won't be home for an hour or two yet, as I have invited one of my friends to give him a little outside entertainment on the way. The servants all went to bed more than an hour ago, and you are completely in my power. Now, once for all, will you be reasonable, and promise not to make a fuss?"

Editha saw that there was no way but to yield, and a feeling of thankfulness stole over her, despite her terror at finding herself again in the wretch's power, that she had concealed John Loker's confession early in the evening.

She signified her assent to the villain's terms by a motion of her head.

"Honor bright?" he asked, adding, fiercely: "I'll choke you instant if you attempt to make any disturbance."

She nodded again, and he at once released his hold of her.

"Now, little Miss Pluck," he resumed, "what have you done with that paper I asked you for once before? I want it, and *I'm going to have it*. Do you hear?"

Editha did hear, and the lines about her small mouth settled into an expression of unyielding firmness.

"You don't mean to give it to me, hey?" he demanded, reading aright her look.

She was too weak and excited from fright to speak, but she shook her head resolutely.

"But I tell you I'm *going* to have it, my lady, or it'll be the worse for you."

A bright thought darted into her mind, and she immediately acted upon it.

"If I will give you the paper, will you go away at once

as quietly as you came, and leave me and everything in the house unmolested?" she asked.

"That's the talk—now you're sensible," the ruffian returned, in a satisfied tone.

"Do you promise?" she persisted.

"Yes; I'll go instanter. You see it's very important for my future career that the little document doesn't get into circulation; so hand it over, and I'll be off as quiet and quick as a mouse."

Editha drew from the envelope she had addressed to Earle the copy she had made, and passed it to him.

He reached out and took the envelope from her, and read the name written upon the back before looking at the paper.

"So, ho! you were going to send it right to headquarters, were you?—and I was just in the nick of time."

Chuckling to himself, he unfolded the paper she had given him and began to read.

The contents seemed to amuse him immensely, for he continued to chuckle and laugh to himself all the way through; but his face grew stern and threatening as he reached the end, and Editha's heart failed her when he said, fiercely:

"This won't do, miss; this is only a copy, and I want the original. Hand it over quick. Did you think I would be so readily cheated?"

"How do you know it is a copy?" she asked.

She had written that also with a pencil, as she could write more rapidly, and she had thought perhaps he would think it was the one she had written in John Loker's house.

"Because I saw John Loker sign the other," he said, with a malignant scowl, adding: "Now, will you hand the other over to me?"

"No, sir, I will not," was the firm reply.

He seemed staggered for a moment at this.

"You won't?" he repeated, at length, with an oath, and fixing his eyes upon her in a way that made her catch her breath and feel as if her strength was forsaking her.

"Do you know," he added, "that you are in the power of a desperate man?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but that paper is of more importance to me than any other possession in the world."

"Ah, ha! is that the way the wind blows? *He's* a lover, eh?" laughed the villain, coarsely, and with a leer that made the blood boil in the young girl's veins and glow hotly in her cheeks. "Allow me to ask," he continued, with a sinister

bleam in his eye, "if it is more precious to you than your—*life?*"

She shrank from him in sudden terror at the question, but, after a moment's thought, she said:

"N-o, I cannot say that it is; but I do not think you would quite dare to *murder* me to get it. At all events *I shall not give it to you.*"

He looked at her with something akin to admiration on his face; he evidently had not expected to find her so resolute, but at the same time her obstinacy angered him.

"You think I would not *dare* to put you out of the way?" he repeated, savagely.

"What good would it do you? You surely would not accomplish your object then," Editha strove to say, dauntlessly, but feeling inwardly very weak and trembling.

He saw the force of her argument and swore again, and, turning to her writing-desk, began turning over its contents.

Of course, he did not find what he sought there, and then commenced a general search of the room.

Bureau drawers, boxes, and every other receptacle that she had were overturned and thoroughly searched.

Her closets also were ransacked, and the pockets of every dress turned wrong side out, but with the same result.

Her jewel-casket stood on her dressing-case open, with all her jewelry nicely arranged on its velvet cushion.

Editha's heart stood still as she saw him approach this, but she did not move or give a sign of the great fear that oppressed her.

He stooped and looked at the pretty things there, took up one or two and examined them more closely, then laid them back again in their place, and turned his attention to something else.

A mighty burden rolled from the fair girl's heart as this danger was passed.

She had expected he would put every article in his pocket, and then perhaps turn the box upside down to seek for more; but evidently he did not care for plunder to-night. At last he came and stood before her.

"I have searched everywhere. It must be upon your person," he said, with a desperate gleam in his eye.

She started from him with a look of terror.

"I swear to you that it is not anywhere about me," she said. "As soon as I made a copy of it I went and hid it, though I could not then have told what made me do it. Now I know," she added, thoughtfully.

He saw that she was speaking only truth, and in great perplexity he sat down to think.

"Is it in this room?" he asked, at length.

"I shall not tell you," Editha answered, her courage beginning to rise as he became discouraged.

"Is it in this house?"

"I shall not tell you," she repeated.

"You're a—plucky piece," he muttered between his teeth, and fixing his fierce eyes again upon her in the strange way she had noticed before.

They seemed to transfix her, and a shuddering sensation pervaded her frame whenever she met them.

"Do you mean to brave me and risk the consequences?" he demanded.

"If you ever gain that paper it will be through your own efforts alone. I shall never *tell* you where it is," she replied, slowly and firmly.

He acted for a moment as if undecided what to do next. Then he took up the letter she had been writing Earle and read it through.

She could not help this, of course, but her cheeks burned and her eyes flashed indignantly as she thought of the tender little passages that she had thrown in now and then, and that had been intended for her lover's eye alone.

She had told him a good deal of her adventure, and how that, as soon as she had copied it, she had hidden the precious original; but strangely enough she never mentioned even to him *where*, but said that no one but herself knew of its hiding-place, and to-morrow she intended taking it to Mr. Felton to see what he advised about it.

"Aha!" said the wretch, as he read this; "no one knows anything about the precious document but yourself?"

"No."

"And to-morrow you were intending to tell some one else about it," he said, rattling the letter he held in his hand.

"Yes."

"And you are sure *nothing* will make you give it to *me*?"

"Never!"

"Then there is but one thing left for me to do," he muttered, striding angrily toward her.

He seized both her hands in his, and again fixed his cruel eye upon hers.

For one moment she looked defiance at him, though she was so frightened by his manner that she had no power to cry out, nor make any effort to release herself from his hold;

the next her expression changed, and her eyes began to droop.

"*Look at me!*" he commanded, bending nearer to her.

She obeyed, and gazed into his face as if suddenly fascinated.

For a moment he held her glance, while she felt as if all her will-power was forsaking her.

He made a few passes over her head and face, touched her upon the pit of the stomach, and she instantly became like a reed in his hands.

He had mesmerized her.

CHAPTER XXX

FLOWN

YES, the strange man had mesmerized Editha Dalton.

He possessed that peculiar power, or magnetic influence, something of which almost every one has either seen or heard, and which should never be exercised except in the most judicious manner, and governed by unquestionable principles.

To all appearances Editha was completely in his power, but whether it was strong enough to make her comply with his every command or not yet remained to be seen.

We have all learned something of the young girl's strength of will, in her resolute adherence to the right and her persistent opposition to everything wrong.

Whether this was all instinct rooted and grounded in her nature, and strengthened for years by conscientious cultivation, which would in a measure protect her and prevent her from becoming his abject slave, could not yet be determined. But he immediately proceeded to test his power.

"Pick up and bring me that paper," he commanded, pointing to the copy of John Loker's confession, which had fallen upon the floor.

She stooped obediently and handed it to him.

"Bring me your watch and chain," was the next mandate.

She hesitated a moment. It had been a gift from Richard Forrester, was very valuable, and she prized it above all her other trinkets.

"Bring it," he repeated.

She went to do his bidding, and gave it to him without a murmur.

But he did not care for it, it seemed, as he laid it down upon her writing-desk and left it there untouched.

"Now give me that ring from your finger," he said, pointing to the beautiful pearl that Earle had placed upon her hand.

She involuntarily clasped her hands tightly together, and stood staring helplessly at him without obeying him.

"Take it off," he repeated, more sternly; but she did not move.

He muttered a curse, and then bade her go bring the contents of her jewel-box.

Instantly she turned to do his bidding, carefully gathered up every article and brought them to him.

Then he commanded her to take them back and arrange them as they belonged.

She unhesitatingly obeyed, quickly arranging everything in its place, and giving no sign of the precious treasure concealed beneath.

Then she went and stood humbly before him again.

"Now go and get that paper signed by John Loker and bring it to me," he said, bending all the power of his will to influence her.

She took one step forward, her eyelids quivered, her nostrils dilated, her bosom heaved; then she stopped, staring helplessly at him, while her hands were again locked in a nervous clasp.

"Strange!" he muttered, with a frown.

He then issued several other commands, which she obediently executed, and at last he told her once more to bring that paper, but with the same result as before.

She would not do it. Her love for Earle, and her determination not to yield anything connected with him, seemed to be an instinct stronger than his power over her.

Again and again he tried to gain his point, but without avail, and, with a perplexed and angry look, he muttered:

"It won't do—my power is not strong enough yet—it will take time; but she says no one knows where the paper is but herself, so *I will take care of her*. She has hid what I want, and now I'll hide her. It will be risky business, but there is no other way; if I go away and leave her, some one else will have it to-morrow morning, and then the whole world will know."

He sat thinking the matter over for some little time, Editha standing patiently by him, as if waiting to do his bidding still further.

"Put those things on," he said, at last, and pointing to a hat and waterproof that had been thrown upon the floor.

She immediately put them on.

"Now get a veil and tie over your face."

With the humility of a servant she obeyed him.

He then went to the door and looked out.

All was still.

The gas in both halls had been partially turned off, and now burned dimly, and nothing was moving in all that great house.

He stepped back into the room, took Editha by the arm, and said, roughly:

"You are to go with me—see that you make no noise."

He then led her out, down the broad stairway, through the lower hall, to the outer door.

In a moment more they were in the street, and he hurried her from the place as fast as she was able to walk.

Reaching a corner several blocks away, he stopped by a carriage which seemed to be waiting there.

This he bade Editha enter, then following her, gathered up the reins and drove rapidly away.

Very early the next morning a very respectable appearing lady and her invalid daughter, the latter much wrapped to shield her from the weather, arrived at the quiet hotel before mentioned.

They had come from a distant part of the State—had been traveling all night, madam said, in order that the sick girl might avail herself of the skill of a noted physician residing in the city.

They took rooms in the upper story of the hotel; it was not so full usually, and more quiet; besides, madam hinted, her daughter was sometimes not quite herself, and they preferred being where they could not disturb others.

She took a whole suite, as her son would occasionally visit them, and be obliged to remain over night.

And thus Editha Dalton was spirited away from her home and hidden away in the very heart of her own city, and there she remained for several weeks until found so strangely by Earle.

Once established there, paying regularly for their accommodations, and giving no trouble, they were regarded as very quiet and respectable boarders, seldom going out except when the young lady was able to ride, closely wrapped, and veiled, and magnetized, and always in a closed carriage, always taking their meals in their own room, as the invalid was "unable to go to the public table," and madam was "unwilling to leave her poor, dear child."

Once in awhile a servant or the clerk, in passing through the upper hall late at night, thought they heard a low sob-

bing and moaning in their rooms, but they had been told something of the invalid's infirmity, and so gave themselves no uneasiness upon the subject.

And so right there in the very midst of the great city, with the detectives at work all about them, and the excitement that the deep mystery was creating, this great wrong was being perpetrated; and had it not been for Earle Wayne's strange whim to change his hotel upon that particular night, when the house was so full, and madam's "son" absent, the story of Editha's remarkable disappearance and rescue would never have been related.

* * * * *

When Editha awoke, after two hours of undisturbed refreshing sleep, she found Earle still sitting beside her, and her former attendant, with her face buried in her hands, sitting in sullen silence upon the lounge opposite.

"I *did* not dream it, then?" she said, looking up into her lover's face with a long-drawn, trembling sigh.

"No, my darling; you have slept too soundly to dream of anything. Are you rested?" he asked, bending down to kiss the sweet quivering lips.

"Yes; but, oh! Earle, don't let *him* come back again," she pleaded, with a shudder, as she reached out her thin hand and grasped his with nervous strength.

He bent his lips to her ear, and whispered:

"No, my own; he is safely locked within the next room, and he can never hurt you again. Bring some more of that drink," he added, addressing the woman opposite.

She arose and obeyed, and Editha drank as eagerly as before.

"Could you eat something?" he asked, regarding with a thrill of pain the thin hands that held the bowl.

"No, not now, Earle; I will wait and take breakfast with you by and by," she answered, with a bright, hopeful look into his anxious face.

"You are feeling better already?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes," she returned, with a ripple of happy laughter. "You know 'a merry heart doeth good like a medicine,' and I feel very happy and *safe* just now."

Indeed, she did not look like the same person that Earle had seen through the transom.

Her eyes were now bright and hopeful, and her face shining with happiness and content.

"You will let me talk now? I cannot sleep any more," she said, as she settled back upon the pillow which he arranged for her.

"If you are able, a little. I do not wish you to get too weary.

"I want to tell you how I happen to be here—at least, all that I know about it myself—and I have *such* good news for you."

"Then let it be in just as few words as possible, or the excitement will be too much for you," he replied, feeling greatly relieved to see her looking so much brighter, and to hear her speak in her natural tone once more.

She began by relating her visit to the Loker's family, and the confession of John Loker, her adventure with the ruffian upon the street, her escape, and his subsequent entrance to her room during the same night.

His face grew grave and troubled as she told him how persistently she had refused to reveal the hiding-place of the precious paper.

"My darling, you ran a terrible risk; he might have taken your life," he said, with a shudder.

"But it was the only proof of *your honor*; it alone would give you back the respect and esteem of men, and I *would not* give it to him," she said, with a sparkle of the old defiance in her eye, then continued: "I did not think he would quite dare do me any personal violence, and I was willing to suffer a great deal rather than lose anything so precious. I do not seem to remember much of what happened after he seized my hands and looked at me in that dreadful way; only it seemed at times, when he spoke to me, as if some force within me was trying to part soul and body—until I found myself here with this strange woman. I was left quietly with her for two or three days, when he came again and tried to frighten me into telling him what he wanted to know. I always refused until he lost his patience and temper, when he would dart toward me, seize my hands, look into my eyes, and almost instantly everything would be a blank to me, and when I came to myself again I would be so exhausted and ill I could not rise."

"The villain mesmerized you," Earle said, with a white, stern face.

"Yes, that was the only explanation that I could think of to account for his peculiar power over me. He has told me almost every time he came that he would allow me to go home if I would tell him my secret; but, of course, I would not do that when I was myself, and, from the fact of his continuing to exercise his influence, I suppose I am just as wilful when under his magnetic control regarding that one thing. Earle," she concluded, slipping her hand confidently

into his, "you have given me a blessed release. I do not believe I could have borne it very much longer, for I have been growing very weak of late; but my prayer night and day has been that I might be spared to you, and that God would not allow him to wring my precious secret from me."

"Why did I find him torturing you with such strange questions about your name and parentage to-night?" Earle asked.

Editha shook her head with a sad smile.

"He almost always came in the night; I suppose there was less danger of his being discovered then; but as for his questions and my answers, I know no more about them than you could have done during all these weeks. Everything became a blank as soon as he touched me and looked at me in a certain way, and I do not know, what I have done or said; I only know that I have suffered horribly sometimes;" and a trembling seized her at the remembrance.

"Woman, what have you to say regarding this strange story?" Earle demanded, turning to the attendant, who had sat motionless during Editha's narrative.

"I have nothing to say," she returned, lifting a defiant face to him.

"It will be better for you to show a friendly disposition," Earle returned, quietly. "I have this villain of whom Miss Dalton speaks securely locked up and ready for the officers as soon as morning breaks, and I will punish you to the extent of the law, also, unless you show a disposition to do what is right."

He then related how he happened to be there that night—how he had searched for her so wearily, until he felt that he must have rest, and coming there, and hearing her sobbing, he had been strangely impressed that something was wrong, and had proceeded to investigate the matter. He told how he had attacked Tom Drake in the hall, dragged and locked him within his own room, and then resolved to enter hers.

The woman appeared greatly disturbed as she listened to this; she evidently had not supposed anything so serious had happened to her partner, and it was a very pale face that Earle looked into as he asked:

"Was it not mesmeric power that the wretch used to try to force Miss Dalton's secret from her?"

"Yes; it can do no harm to tell that much," she muttered.

"What was the meaning of those very strange questions he put to her to-night?"

She thought a moment, and then said:

"It was necessary for Miss Dalton's health that she should go out at times and get the air; but we never took her out unless she was mesmerized, and Tom thought that if anything happened to us at any time, and she should be questioned, if she answered as he taught her, no one would suspect or molest her."

"Is he in the habit of exercising his power over people in this way in carrying on his nefarious business?" Earle demanded.

The woman would not reply, and Editha said:

"Whether he has ever carried it so far with any one else is doubtful; but I heard him say once, when they both thought I was asleep, that unless something turned up pretty soon he would be obliged to go to lecturing again, and showing off in the old way, which I took to mean that he had once lectured upon the subject of mesmerism, and tried his experiments upon the public."

"The wretch! He will have an opportunity to practice something else, and show off in a different way before long, I'm thinking," Earle answered, sternly.

Day was beginning to break, and the occupants of the house were arousing from their slumbers.

"My darling," Earle said to Editha, "you must have a larger and more airy room than this immediately;" and he arose and rang the bell.

"Earle, you will not leave me?" she said, the frightened look returning to her face.

"No; I shall only go to the door to speak with the waiter; and you," turning to her attendant, "will please assist Miss Dalton to dress meanwhile, so that she can be moved."

The waiter soon knocked at the door, and Earle stepped just outside to converse with him.

He told him something of what had happened during the night, and the man expressed no little surprise at what he heard, and that the long lost Miss Dalton had been concealed in that house. He then asked him if it would be possible for him to give Miss Dalton a better room, and he replied that some of the guests had already departed on an early train, and he should have a first-class room at his disposal in fifteen minutes.

A half-hour later Editha was borne into a beautiful apartment, where not long after she and Earle breakfasted together, a heavy burden lifted from both their hearts, while the former, happy in the presence of her lover, seemed to grow brighter, stronger, and more like herself every moment.

At eight o'clock Earle bethought himself of his prisoner,

he having locked the woman into the room as soon as Editha had been removed.

"When I have attended to that matter," he said, drawing her tenderly to him and kissing her now smiling lips, "I will telegraph immediately to Mr. Dalton; and, darling, when he comes I have some joyful news to tell you both. I do not fear that he will oppose any obstacles to our marriage now. I trust all our troubles are over."

Alas! they could not know that they were standing upon the brink of even a more fearful precipice—about to be plunged into a deeper abyss of grief and trouble than either had yet known. Earle went out for an officer to arrest his prisoners, and, soon returning, proceeded to the rooms where he had left them, as he thought, so secure.

Both doors were open! Both birds had flown!

CHAPTER XXXI

A STORMY INTERVIEW

THE consternation that Earle and the officers experienced when they discovered that both Tom Drake and his accomplice had escaped, can be better imagined than described. But there was no help for it; the former had undoubtedly had burglars' instruments in his possession, and while Editha was being removed and attended to, had picked the lock upon the door where he was confined, and then released his companion in mischief and fled.

The news that Miss Dalton was at last found, with many of the circumstances attending her discovery, spread like wild-fire, and soon brought numerous friends and acquaintances to see and congratulate her upon the happy event.

Mr. Felton was among the first, and the old gentleman appeared as rejoiced to see her as if she had been his own child, and was enthusiastic in his praises of her courage and bravery in refusing to give up the precious document that could alone restore Earle his honor.

Mr. Dalton was immediately telegraphed to, and three days later he, also, made his appearance in her room at the hotel.

She had improved very rapidly during those three days, and though she was still exceedingly weak and nervous, starting at the lightest noise, the wild light returning to her eyes, yet the color was beginning to return to her cheeks and lips, the music to her voice, and the old look of brightness to her face.

Mr. Dalton greeted Editha with some show of fondness, but he appeared anything but pleased when he heard of Earle's return, and that it was through his instrumentality that she obtained her release, and almost immediately his manner began to assume its former coolness toward her. But Miss Dalton was not a daughter to be slighted by any means, when she had such a snug fortune of her own; and it now began to be whispered quite generally that Mr. Dalton had been exceedingly unfortunate in some of his speculations, and that it was a very fine thing that he could have her income to fall back upon during this rainy day.

While he was not exactly uncivil or aggressive in his treatment of Earle, yet he testified his displeasure at his presence by sullen looks, sarcasm and sneers, until Earle more than once lost patience, and would have had it out with him had he not feared that any trouble would be serious injury to Editha in her weak state.

But although he was very forbearing and always courteous, yet he never seemed to gain any ground with his enemy, and at last resolved to bring matters to a crisis.

He called upon Mr. Dalton one morning at his own room, and formally proposed for Editha's hand in marriage. Of course he had anticipated a refusal, and of course he got it.

"I think, Mr. Dalton," he said, not at all disconcerted, "that if you will listen while I explain to you something of the change that has occurred in my prospects during the last few months, you will not only be willing to waive all your objections, but give us both your blessing, instead of so curt a refusal."

Mr. Dalton sneered visibly at this; indeed his face was gradually acquiring a habitual sneer, as if things generally were disturbing his tranquillity.

"Ahem! Mr. Wayne, permit me to say that no change, of *whatever nature*, in your prospects would affect my decision. You cannot marry Miss Dalton."

"But, sir, remember that no stain rests upon my name now. I am free from every taint."

"Indeed! I am glad that *you* are so happy as to think so," he returned, satirically.

Earle flushed, but, controlling his indignation, he returned:

"I not only think so, but all the world will be obliged to acknowledge it very soon, as I have already taken measures to have John Loker's confession made public."

"What the world may think does not concern me at all; you will please consider my answer as final and unalterable;" and he waived his hand as if to dismiss the subject entirely.

Again the hot blood rushed to Earle's very forehead, and it was all he could do not to let his temper fly.

"Will you please to give me some reason for what seems to me an unreasonable refusal?" he asked, quietly; then, after an instant's thought, he added. "I have lately fallen heir to quite a handsome property, and can place Miss Dalton in a position befitting her worth."

"I regret, for your sake, that I am unable to confer the favor requested upon one *so noble* and heir to such *brilliant* prospects; but even were it possible, allow me to ask what *name* you could bestow upon Miss Dalton?" and the look accompanying this question was so cunning and full of malice that for a moment Earle was startled.

"The woman I wed will never have cause to blush for the name she bears, sir," he replied, with an indignant flush, and wondering if it was possible that Mr. Dalton could know aught concerning his previous history.

"Ah, indeed!" was the sarcastic reply. "I trust—I hope truly that you may find one *worthy to bear it*. Miss Dalton cannot. I decline that honor for her."

"Miss Dalton is of age, I believe, sir," Earle said, very quietly, but the words were rather ominous.

"Miss Dalton is about twenty-two, Mr.—ah—*Wayne*."

Why was it, Earle wondered, that Mr. Dalton almost always addressed him in this peculiar way now, with a pause, an interjection, and that strange emphasis on his last name?

But he replied to his last remark with a dignity that became him well:

"Then, sir, we will leave the question for her to decide, and abide by her verdict. I desired to render you all due courtesy, but, of course, you are as well aware as I that my seeking your approval was a mere matter of form. Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," Mr. Dalton returned, with a mocking bow, and saw him depart with a sinister smile and an almost fiendish chuckle.

Earle immediately sought Editha, and communicated the result of the interview to her.

"I shall not ask you to run away with me, my darling," he said, with a fond smile, "for I must marry my wife in an honorable way. Neither shall I use any arguments to try to persuade you to defy your father and marry me openly. I shall leave it entirely with you. It must be just as your own heart dictates. Editha, you must decide this matter for yourself and me."

"Oh, Earle, it is hard," she said; "my heart tells me that

I belong to you, while a feeling of pity and affection prompts me to consider, as far as is right, the feelings and wishes of my father. I cannot understand him; he is so changed since mamma and Uncle Richard died, I sometimes fear that his mind is affected."

Earle thought that his mind was affected decidedly, being possessed with an evil spirit of some kind.

"An impassible barrier seems to have arisen between us," Editha continued, sadly; "and he has taken such an unaccountable dislike to you that it seems very strange to me. Let me think it all over for one night, Earle. Come to me to-morrow at this time and you shall have my answer."

Earle complied with her request and left her, feeling sad and depressed himself.

He knew that he ought to return immediately to Wycliffe. He had been gone a long time now, and was trespassing more than he liked upon Mr. Tressalia's good nature; but he did not feel as if he could even think of such a thing as returning and leaving Editha behind.

The more he considered the matter the more inexplicable Mr. Dalton's fierce spite against him appeared. It seemed so almost childishly unreasonable that he would not even listen while he told him of his prospects. He seemed to talk as if he was aware of something very shameful and degrading connected with him, and yet he could not understand how Mr. Dalton, here in America, could possibly know aught of his previous history, or the shadow of shame that had hung over his early life.

Then, too, his declaring that "*no change of whatever nature*" in his prospects could affect his answer seemed to imply some deep and bitter personal hatred that, not being conscious of ever having done him an injury, he could not fathom.

"It surely could not be," he thought, "because Richard Forrester had so kindly remembered him at the time of his death, and it was a petty feeling of jealousy."

He had not touched the money which Editha had so nobly insisted upon investing for him. It still lay accumulating in the bank, and would remain there until the end of time for any use that he would make of it.

And so, after perplexing his brain over the matter, only to become more deeply puzzled, he resolved to let it drop, hoping that everything would come out right in the end.

Notwithstanding Mr. Dalton's sarcastic and almost insulting language and manner to him, Earle did not cherish the least feeling of ill-will toward him.

At the time a feeling of indignation and impatience at his injustice would momentarily arouse his hot blood, but this soon passed, and he sincerely pitied him for being the slave of such unholy passions as he manifested.

The next morning, feeling very uneasy and apprehensive of he knew not what, he called, as Editha had desired.

He could not shake off the feeling that he was about to meet some dreadful impending fate; it seemed almost as if a voiceless, wordless warning was impressing him, and he found himself involuntarily repeating the words of one who said:

"Often do the spirits
Of great events stride on before the events,
And in to-day already walks to-morrow."

He found Editha calm, but looking weary and very sad, as if the struggle of deciding had been too much for her strength.

She came and went toward him, looking so pale that she seemed more like some beautiful spirit about to fade from his sight than a woman whom he longed to call "wife."

"I have decided, Earle," she said, the tears shining in her eyes as she held out both hands to him in greeting.

He took them and drew her toward him, searching her fair face with his anxious eyes.

"My darling!" he said, in low, intense pleading tones.

"I am going with *you*," she whispered; and his arms instantly encircled her, a low-spoken thangsgiving and blessing falling from his lips, the burden rolling from his heart.

"Papa is already so estranged from me," she continued, "that I know I should be miserable to let you go back alone; you would be very unhappy also."

The closer clasp of the arms infolding her confirmed the truth of her statements, and told her how very dear she was to him.

The golden head drooped and rested trustfully against his shoulder, and she went on:

"Perhaps, when he sees how determined I am, he may relent and consent to go with us. At all events, I feel that I have no right to ruin both our lives, and yield to an unreasonable command of his."

Before Earle could reply, Mr. Dalton himself entered the room.

"Ah! quite an affecting tableau," he said, with a disagreeable sneer; "it seems to be my privilege to—to have the benefit of these interesting scenes."

His eyes glittered with anger as they rested upon Earle, but he continued, speaking to Editha:

"I must beg pardon for the intrusion; I merely came to say that I want you to be ready to go to Newport next week."

Editha flushed.

He had never spoken quite so peremptorily to her before; he had been more willing to consult her convenience and pleasure, more especially since he had in a measure been dependent upon her income to supply his own wants.

She had seen, too, the look of malignant hatred which he had cast upon Earle, and her spirit arose in rebellion against it.

She had quietly withdrawn from her lover's embrace when the door opened, but remained standing by his side.

"Papa, I—I am not going to Newport this summer," she said, with outward calmness; but Earle could almost feel her tremble, and his heart ached for her, in prospect of the conflict which he knew must come.

"Not going to Newport!" Mr. Dalton said, with raised eyebrows and well-feigned surprise. "Who ever heard of such a thing as our not going to Newport during the summer? Of course you are going to Newport, Editha; I could not think of leaving you at home alone, and—I should be so exceedingly lonesome;" and he shot a cunning glance at the young couple, that disagreeable sneer still upon his lips.

"Papa, I am really sorry if you will be lonely——" began Editha, a tremble in her voice, when Earle quietly laid his hand upon hers and stopped her.

"Mr. Dalton," he said, in a cold, business-like tone, "we may as well come to the point and have this matter settled once for all. Editha has already decided to return with me to Europe as my wife."

Instead of a blaze of anger, as he had expected, Mr. Dalton chuckled audibly, and gleefully rubbed his hands together, as if this were really a delightful piece of news to him.

But he took no more notice of Earle than if he had not been there. Instead, he again addressed himself to Editha:

"My dear, did I understand that last statement of Mr.—ah—*Wayne's* correctly?"

"You did, papa," she answered, but it was a great effort for her to utter the three short words.

"You have decided to spend your future in Europe?"

"Yes, sir."

She ventured to glance at him. She could understand neither his tone nor his mood.

"You will leave your native land and go with a stranger to a foreign country?"

"Earle is no stranger, papa," she said, quickly; "we have known him for years, and surely you ought to be willing to trust me with one so good and true as he is."

"So good and true!" he repeated, mockingly. "You are exceedingly fond of Mr. Wayne?"

"Yes, sir, I *am*," Editha now said, boldly, and turning her flashing eyes full upon him.

Her indignation was rising—her patience giving out under his scathing sarcasms.

"Mr. Wayne ought to be a happy man—he doubtless is a happy man in having so brave and fair a champion. It is so beautiful to witness such entire trust and confidence—such fervent affection. My dear, you can go to Europe with Mr. Wayne if you choose, I suppose, seeing that you have attained your majority, as he has once hinted to me, but—*you cannot as his wife!*"

The whole sentence was spoken with great apparent calmness and deliberation, but his eyes glowed like a burning flame upon the lovers standing so proudly side by side.

"If my majority gives me the right to choose upon one point, it does upon the other also, I suppose," she returned, coldly.

"Oh, no, my dear, you are entirely mistaken there," returned Mr. Dalton, with aggravating affability, and darting a fiery glance at Earle.

"Papa, I do not understand you in this mood at all," Editha said, with some hauteur; "but I will say, once for all, that I think you are exceedingly unkind, as well as unreasonable. What possible objection can you have to Earle in a moral point of view?"

A gleam of malicious amusement flashed over his face as he answered:

"You must excuse me, Editha, but—really—I should not presume to set myself up as a judge upon Mr.—ah—*Wayne's* morals—nor indeed upon the morals of any one."

"Then I do not consider that you have any right, for a mere prejudice, to ruin both his life and mine—our united happiness depends upon this union; and, papa, I shall

marry Mr. Wayne—if not *with* your consent, then without it,” she concluded, firmly.

“My dear, allow me to repeat, you *cannot* marry Mr. Wayne.”

“And I repeat that I *shall* do so.”

Mr. Dalton chuckled again.

“Mr. *Wayne* will, I suppose, be very *proud* to bestow his *name* upon you,” he said, significantly.

“Allow me to ask what you mean to insinuate by that assertion?” Earle here interposed, flushing deeply.

“Wayne is a name that one might well be proud of, if one had a *right* to it,” he answered, maliciously.

“And you mean me to understand that you think I have no right to it?”

“I have my doubts upon the matter.”

“You think I am an impostor—that I have been seeking Miss Dalton’s affections under false pretensions—under an assumed name?” Earle demanded, with dignity.

“I *have* had some such idea; yes,” Mr. Dalton answered, with a strange smile.

“Mr. Dalton, *what* do you mean? What do you really know about me?”

Mr. Dalton replied only by a low laugh, and Earle continued, with some excitement:

“My name is Earle Wayne—it is the name that my mother gave to me upon my birth, and I will now say——”

“*Your mother!*” he interrupted, and a scornful, bitter laugh rang out, making both his listeners shudder, it was so fiendishly unnatural.

“Papa, why do you talk like this? *Why* are you so prejudiced against Earle?” Editha burst forth, unable to bear any more.

“‘*Prejudice*’ is a *very mild term*, Editha,” he replied with glittering eyes.

“What reason have you for hating him, then?” she cried, passionately.

“I have the very best reason in the world, according to my judgment, for *hating not only him, but all that ever belonged to him*,” Mr. Dalton answered, with deliberate emphasis.

“Sir,” exclaimed Earle, in startled surprise, “*what* do you know about me, or those belonging to me? and why do you still persist in saying that Miss Dalton cannot be my wife, when she has distinctly stated that she has decided the matter? What possible barrier can there be

to our union save the petty spite you so ignobly manifest toward me?"

Mr. Dalton laughed again at this—a low, mocking laugh—and rubbed his hands in sardonic glee, while Earle regarded him in amazed perplexity, and Editha wondered if her father was not losing his mind that he should act thus.

"Does it surprise you, young man, that I appear to have some knowledge of you? and shall I tell you, Editha Dalton, why you can *never* become his wife?" he asked, and Editha shivered and grew white at his ominous words. "You know," he continued, still addressing her, "that I never tolerate or forgive opposition from any one—never forgive either a fancied or a real wrong. Mine is a peculiar temperament, I know, yet I am what I am, and those who foil or oppose me must take the consequences. I have never *loved* your devoted admirer, and since I have discovered *his secret*——"

"Secret!" breathed both his listeners, in surprise.

"Yes, *secret*. Had you no secret when you came to Richard Forrester?" demanded Mr. Dalton of Earle, and gnawing his lip savagely.

Yes, I own that I had," Earle answered, with a sigh; "but——"

"But a smooth tongue and lying lips will gloss almost anything over," his enemy interrupted, sneeringly.

"Papa, you are fearfully unjust. Earle is the soul of truth," Editha cried, indignantly, adding: "What if he had a secret?—he had a right to it, and no one should seek to pry into it. At any rate, I do not believe it is anything that affected his honor or nobility."

"Thank you, Editha," Earle said, gracefully. "I *had* a secret, but, thank Heaven, it need be a secret no longer; and if you will both listen calmly, I will explain its nature to you; I have only been waiting for a favorable opportunity to do so."

"You hear, Editha?—he has a secret, and such a secret! Shall I tell it? I think I can do so much more effectively than he. He is a ——"

We will not write the horrible word that sent every bit of blood back upon Editha's heart and made Earle speechless from astonishment and indignation.

It was uttered with a venomous hatred such as few are capable of either feeling or showing; and then, without waiting to note the effect of his words, he went on, in wild and excited tones:

"Now, my fair champion of high-toned morality, is not that a piece of news to make your ears tingle? You have dared to oppose me time and again," he continued, with a scowl at her; "you have set aside my wishes and authority to favor *him*, until I am determined that you shall suffer for it; and your punishment, as well as his, will be no light one. Now, what have you to say? Have I not advanced a good and sufficient reason for your not marrying him, or shall I be obliged to add another and stronger one?"

He glared upon the fair girl, his whole face working with the passion that raged within him.

For a moment she could not speak.

She glanced from him to Earle, who stood very pale but clam, and with a slight curl upon his handsome lips.

For an instant he had been tempted to cast the lie in the teeth of his foe, then he decided to await Editha's reply.

She had not been whiter on that night when he had found her in the power of Tom Drake than she was at this moment, and a weary, hunted look shone in her blue eyes.

"I do not believe it," she said, drawing herself to her full height; "but even if it were true, it is *not* a sufficient reason, for the sin and shame are not his—they belong to a previous generation."

A wild, mocking laugh burst from Mr. Dalton's lips at this.

"Such disinterested devotion it has never been my pleasure to witness before," he cried.

Earle's deep-drawn sigh of gratitude and thankfulness at Editha's reply had not been lost upon him, and it had seemed to work him up to the highest pitch of excitement.

"Mr. Dalton——" the young man began.

"*Hush!* will you? I'll attend to you when I get through with her," he said, with a gesture of authority; "this girl has got to learn that she cannot defy *me* with impunity. Now, miss, as I've driven that nail home, hadn't I better clinch it? Shall I tell you yet more to convince you that you can never marry this nameless vagabond?" and he bent toward her until his evil face almost touched hers.

She drew back from him with an involuntary expression of disgust.

Then she said, with a strangely sinking heart and shaking voice:

"If you have anything more to tell me, please tell it *quick!*"

"A '*good and sufficient reason*' I told you I had," he returned, very slowly and deliberately, and glancing from one to the other to mark the effect of his words. "Yes, it is; and

I think you will both be obliged to acknowledge it when I tell you that *Earle Wayne*, as he calls himself, is MY OWN SON!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE TABLES TURNED

"Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils."

EARLE suddenly reeled at these astounding words, as if some one had struck him a heavy blow.

"Mr. Dalton! Sir!" he cried, aghast, and regarding him for the moment in helpless amazement.

"Papa!" Editha exclaimed, an expression of utter incredulity upon her face.

She really thought that her father was deranged. She believed that he had cherished his bitterness toward Earle until he had become a monomaniac upon that point, and now, under the excitement of the moment, and their defiance of him, he had lost his reason entirely.

"Does all this surprise you, my *children*?" Mr. Dalton asked, with a gloating grin at Earle. "It is not to be wondered at," he went on; "but it is true, nevertheless. Earle Wayne, as he calls himself, though he has no more right to the name than I have, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

Earle was terribly moved by his speech. His breath came labored and heavily, his teeth were locked together, and his hands were clenched until they were fairly livid.

He took one fierce stride forward, as if he could have felled the man to the floor, then suddenly stopped, and asked, in low, concentrated tones:

"Prove what you have said! Is your real name Dalton?" yet even as he asked the question a cold sweat settled upon his forehead and about his mouth.

"Yes; I have always answered to the name of George Sumner Dalton, though for brevity's sake I dropped the first name many years ago."

"*George Sumner Dalton!*" repeated Earle, mechanically.

"Yes, you have it correct. Do you recognize any part of it?" was the mocking reply.

"I see, I see," murmured the young man, pressing his hands upon his temples, and looking as if he was paralyzed with the suddenness of the intelligence.

Then all his mother's sufferings—all the wrongs and disgraces of his own early life suddenly surged over him with overwhelming force, and he turned fiercely upon the man who dared to stand there and taunt him with those cruel facts.

"Then *you* are the man whom I have been looking for for seven long years," he cried. "*You* are the wretch who plotted to betray my mother, and you dare stand there and *own* the dastardly act—you dare acknowledge the deed that makes you a man to be shunned and despised by all true, good men, brands you worse than a second Cain, and makes me loathe you until my very soul is sick, notwithstanding that the same blood may flow in our veins?"

"Earle! Earle! *what* are you saying?" cried Editha, wildly, and springing to his side, as the burning words fell with almost blighting force from his lips. "Spare him, Earle—I do not think he knows what he has been saying; this wild, wild story cannot be true; he must be *mad*!" And she clung to him, trembling in every limb, her teeth chattering with nervousness.

Earle himself shuddered as her words fell upon his ear, and his very heart seemed dying within him as he bent a look of keenest anguish upon her face.

Sumner Dalton his father and hers!

Could any torture more horrible than the knowledge of that fact be poured out upon him?

Yet he saw that she did not credit the story—ay, it seemed too wild for any one to credit. But he knew it was true.

He put his arm around her and led her to a seat.

"My darling—my darling!" he cried, in a voice of despair, "can we ever bear it? I thought our sorrows were all at an end; they have but just begun. God give us both strength to bear it."

"Earle," she said, with a piteous look into his quivering face, "you *do* not believe what he has said? Oh!" clasping her hands with a frightened look, "just think what it means, if it *should* be true. You *do* not believe it, Earle?"

He bowed his head until his forehead touched her golden hair, and groaned aloud.

"My darling, I believe the knowledge will kill me, but *I know that it is true*," he said, in a hoarse and unnatural voice.

She shrank from his sheltering arm with a cry that rang in his ears for years.

Folding his arms tight across his breast, as if to keep his hands from performing a swift and terrible vengeance, Earle instantly turned and faced the man who owned himself his father.

"You *know* it, do you?" Mr. Dalton said, before he could speak. "You own the relationship, then? You know all your mother's story, and how she cheated me, and kept me from the knowledge of who she was, the position she occupied, and the great wealth she was to inherit some day? If she had told *me*, I should to-day have been the father of the Marquis of Wycliffe, and occupying one of the proudest positions in England. I would have married her honorably if she had told me, but she cheated me out of a magnificent fortune, and I stand here to-day a ruined man, a beggar. Do you wonder that I hated *you*, for her sake, when I found out who you were? Do you wonder that I have always hated Marion Vance for defrauding me thus?"

"Hold!" cried Earle, so sternly that he stopped involuntarily. "Do not dare to take my mother's pure name upon your vile lips, nor vent your petty spite upon her for what you were *alone* to blame."

"*Pure name!*" burst forth the furious man, recklessly. "Doubtless you are very proud of it—the name that you should bear instead of the one you do. But I have had my revenge, or at least a part of it; for, if through her obstinacy I lost the glory which should have been mine, I did not suffer alone—she was driven out, a nameless outcast, from her ancestral home, never to enter there again, while her proud inheritance descended to another branch of the family, though I don't know who, and made her offspring a beggar. If she had only told me that night in London," he went on, talking more to himself than to any one else, "I would gladly have married her on the spot. But she didn't; when she found I wouldn't compromise myself, she let her pride ruin both her and me; and *how* I have hated her ever since. But her suffering was the greater, and I know her sensitive soul must have nearly died within her at the idea of entailing her disgrace upon her offspring. Ah! if I could have found her after that, I'd have made her pay the penalty for cheating me so," he concluded, with intense bitterness, remembering what he had lost.

"Do not forget that *you* were the traitor," Earle said. "You lured her on to destruction with soft words and smiles; you won her pure heart, and tempted her into a secret marriage, professing to love her as simple Marion Vance, and for the innocent love she lavished upon you. You did all this to *amuse* yourself and *pass away an idle summer*. She believed you, and trusted in your honor, and she gloried in her secret, because of the joyful surprise she would be able to give you when you should go with her to her father to

confess that she was your wife. If you had been true to her, if you had not tried to play that dastardly trick upon her, you might have attained to the greatness which your mean and ambitious soul coveted. You *cheated yourself*, and now the meanest of all traits that weak human nature is heir to is revealed in you—you *hate the one you sought to injure, simply because you overreached yourself, and the wrong recoiled in a measure upon you.*"

Sumner Dalton glared angrily at him, for Earle read his degraded nature like an open book, and it was by no means pleasant to be compelled to view the picture he had drawn.

"You appear to know all about your mother's history," he said at last, with some curiosity.

"Yes," he answered, with a look of pain; "I know it all—how she suffered when you did not come to her—how anxious she grew when she discovered that her honor must be vindicated, and you did not even write to her in answer to her heart-rending appeals—how she determined that she would be acknowledged as your lawful wife, and sought you in London one dismal night, and begged you, with all the eloquence which she could command, to right the wrong you had done her. Had you consented, she resolved to tell you then and there of the brilliant future awaiting you. But you spurned her from you instead—you turned coldly from her and her almost idolatrous love, mocking her misery, and telling her that the woman you married must be endowed with wealth and position—if she could assure you of these, you would consent to make her an honorable wife; but you would not marry her to save her from the shame that you had brought upon her. Then it was that she learned your utter heartlessness—that you cared for nothing or for no one but yourself and the things that would serve to gratify your selfish ambition. She would not be an *unloved* wife, and she knew that when you should discover the greatness you had missed you would be rightly punished; and so, in her pride, she turned from you in silence regarding her prospects, vowing that she would not wed you then if it would save both your lives; she resolved to bear her shame alone, knowing that the day was not far distant when you would be willing to sacrifice much to undo that wrong—when you would curse yourself for your folly. I judge from your words to-day that that time did come—that you suffered keenly when you discovered that the trap you had set for your victim had also sprung on yourself. As I said before, you are the man for whom I have been searching for the last seven years—that was the business upon which I went that

night when this house was robbed, and returning became entangled in the affair. I thought I had gained a clew to the whereabouts of a George Sumner, and I meant, if I found you, to brand you the traitor and the coward that you are——”

“Softly—softly, young man,” interrupted Sumner Dalton, a white light gleaming from his eyes. “I suppose you mean by that that you would like to pommel me within an inch of my life; but this is a country which does not permit such things—there are penalties for such indiscretions as those, and as you have already served one term for the benefit of the State, I hardly think you would enjoy another.”

Oh, how the heart of Earle Wayne rebelled against this insult! But he knew that retribution did not always fall upon the offender in the form of blows, and he answered, with quiet scorn:

“You mistake, sir. I would not degrade myself enough to lay even a finger upon you.”

This shot told; Earle could see by the twitching of the muscles about his mouth, and the sudden clenching of his hands, and he replied, with malevolent spite:

“Yes; what you say is true—I am the George Sumner who enticed Marion Vance into secret marriage. I got Austin Osgood to perform the ceremony—a clever fellow, and always up to all sorts of mischief; but the scamp has never shown his face to me since, for some unaccountable reason. I must confess I did feel a little squeamish and sorry for the girl when she took on so; but when I found how she had deceived me, I had not a regret—I gloried in her shame, and the shame she must entail upon her offspring. I gloried in the suffering I knew she would experience, as day after day she looked upon her child and thought of the noble inheritance she had deprived it of by her folly. A week after she came to me one of my friends told me the story of Marion Vance’s dishonor—how that all the world knew then that she had been driven from her father’s house in disgrace. It was then that I learned *who* she was and *what* I had lost. I left everything and began to search for her, resolved I would make her marry me, so that our child might be born in wedlock and inherit the estates of Wycliffe. But she had hidden herself so securely that she could not be found, and, when the time had passed that must elapse before her child was born, I gave up the search and returned to America. But I had learned to hate her with all the strength of my nature, and if by any means I had ever en-

countered her, I would have crushed her as relentlessly as I would crush a reptile. When I discovered that you were her son, I knew that through you I could doubtless make her suffer, and I meant to crush you, too. Now you know why I have been your bitter foe for all these years," he concluded, with a look so baleful that Earle turned away in disgust.

"My mother is forever beyond your reach—she died more than seven years ago," he said, solemnly. A slight shiver disturbed Sumner Dalton's frame, but he made no reply.

"How did you discover that I was Marion Vance's child?" Earle asked, after a few moments of silence.

Mr. Dalton laughed, but a feeling of shame made him color, notwithstanding.

"Perhaps you remember leaving a package of papers with Richard Forrester for safe keeping while you were absent for three years," he said, recklessly. "He left them with Editha when he died, and, I being somewhat curious to know what was so carefully guarded by so large a seal, I took the liberty to inspect them, little thinking that I should discover so *near* and *dear* a relative by so doing."

Editha here started up, and, lifting her white face from her trembling hands, cried out:

"Shame!"

"Thank you; a very respectful way of addressing a parent," Mr. Dalton sneered, while Earle's lip curled disdainfully, and a hot flush again mounted to his brow. "I must say, however," Mr. Dalton continued, "that the package was not worthy of the effort it cost me to open it, and contained nothing of interest to me beyond the pictures and writing that proved to me you were Marion Vance's child, unless, I except some hieroglyphics on a piece of cardboard that I could not read."

Earle's expression was a peculiar one, as he asked:

"Did you examine that piece of cardboard critically?"

"No; I tossed it one side when I found I could not read it."

"I have it with me now—I always carry it with me, for it contains matter of the most vital importance to me, and might possibly interest you considerably."

He drew it from his pocket as he spoke, and held it so that Mr. Dalton could see the writing in cipher.

He recognized it instantly.

"These hieroglyphics, as you call them, merely tell what the cardboard contains."

"What it contains!" repeated Mr. Dalton, his curiosity now fully aroused.

To him it appeared only a single piece of rather heavy cardboard.

"Yes; if you had examined it carefully you would have noticed that it is apparently composed of three layers, but the middle one is cut out very near the edge, so as to allow of some closely written sheets of thin paper to be inserted. I remove one end of what appears the middle layer—thus, and you perceive that the papers easily slide out of their pocket."

He held it upside down, gave it a little shake, and some very thin sheets of paper, upon which there was writing, with another long, narrow slip which was not so thin, fell upon the table.

"This, perhaps, may contain something of interest to you," Earle said, taking the latter up and holding it before Mr. Dalton.

It was the marriage certificate which the old rector had given Marion on the evening of her marriage.

He laughed long, loud, and scornfully as he saw it.

"I always thought Austin Osgood carried matters a little too far when he dared to sign the old rector's name to a real marriage certificate, and give it to Marion. But I suppose it made it seem more real to the girl, only I wonder at her keeping the useless paper after she discovered the fraud. As for Austin, I told you before, I never saw him again. Perhaps he, also, thought he had gone too far in the matter, and was afraid he might be overhauled for forgery."

Earle did not make any reply to these remarks; he merely returned the certificate to the cardboard pocket and took up another paper.

"Here is some information that I stumbled upon purely by accident—no, I should not say that," he added, in a reverent tone; "I ought to say, a Divine Providence led me to it. Shall I read it to you, or will you read it for yourself? It is very closely connected with that little drama in St. John's Chapel at Winchelsea."

Mr. Dalton moved uneasily in his chair. Somehow the words of this grave, calm young man, with his self-contained bearing, and a suspicion of great reserve force about him, made him feel as if he might have the advantage in his hands.

He began to fear that those papers might contain something very disagreeable, and something that had been reserved especially for him.

What could Earle Wayne have been searching for him for during all these years?

Surely not merely to acquaint him with the fact that he knew he was the illegitimate son of himself and Marion Vance.

But he held out his hand for the paper, preferring to read it for himself.

Earle gave it to him, saying:

"This is simply a copy of something in Bishop Grafton's diary. I made it myself from the original."

Sumner Dalton unfolded that paper with a feeling of great uneasiness, and began to read how the sexton had confessed the trouble on his mind to the rector—how the old man had himself gone to the chapel, and, concealing himself, had seen a young man come into the robing-room, disguise himself, and then proceed to assume the sacred vestures.

He read how the rector had interposed, ascertained the names of the young couple, driven the accomplice ignominiously from the field, filled out and signed the marriage certificate, and then himself proceeded to the chapel and married the unsuspecting pair.

A terrible oath leaped from Sumner Dalton's lips, and the paper dropped from his nerveless hand, as he finished reading this startling revelation.

"It is a lie!" he cried, his face ashen, and a great fear in his eyes.

"It is no lie," Earle returned, sternly. "I went myself to see the place where I supposed my gentle mother had been so cruelly deceived. I sought the sexton, and he told me concerning his part in the transaction, and then directed me to Bishop Grafton's daughter for further information, he being dead. She was only too glad to aid me—told me of her father's diary, and what she had read of this there. She then brought it to me, and kindly allowed me to make this copy. The signature upon the marriage certificate corresponds exactly with his own in the journal, and Miss Grafton is perfectly willing that any one interested or concerned in this matter should see the original. There is a little more," Earle added, taking up another paper, "which I think will convince you beyond a doubt of the truth of what you have already read."

He then read himself aloud how the good man's heart had been troubled on account of the young and tender maiden, and, fearing that some great trouble might come to her, he had resolved to make that last entry in his diary:

"MARRIED—In St. John's Chapel, Winchelsea, August 11th, 18—, by the Reverend Joshua Grafton, bishop, and rector of St. John's parish, George Sumner, of Rye, to Miss Marion Vance, also of Rye. I take my oath that this is a true statement.

"September 10th, 18—. JOSHUA GRAFTON, Rector."

For what seemed a long time after the reading of this, Sumner Dalton sat as if turned to stone, his face white as his shirt-bosom, his eyes wild and staring, and his hands locked together in a painful clasp.

Then starting up with an exclamation of horror, he cried: "Then I have been doubly cheated and duped. No wonder that Austin Osgood never dared to come near me again."

"And," Earle said, quietly and impressively, "Marion Vance's honor was never marred by the shadow of a stain, though she suffered the same as if it had been, and—*her son was not born illegitimate!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII

"I OWE YOU NOTHING"

"OH, why did I not know of this?" groaned Sumner Dalton, beating his brow with his hands. "I was, after all, the legal husband of the heiress of Wycliffe. All these years I might have occupied that proud position, and with unlimited wealth at my command. It is too much—too much to bear. What evil genius has been pursuing me all my life, that I should have missed it all?"

"That 'evil genius,' as you term it, was but your own villainy—the spirit that rules in your own evil heart. You sought to ruin an innocent girl, and you overreached yourself. For once justice and punishment has been meted out where it belongs, and you have no one to blame for it but yourself," Earle answered, sternly.

"'Tis *false!* She should have told me. She had no right to hide the knowledge from me—her husband."

"You forget that you scorned her, and told her she had no claim upon you, and also that you refused to give her any right to call you husband."

"But she had no business to consent to marry me under such false pretenses. 'Twas *she* who has kept me from my rights, when I might have been master of Wycliffe *all*

these years—twenty-five years of glory and honor lost. It is *too* much; and if I could make her feel my vengeance now I would," he groaned.

Earle turned from him, almost sick with disgust.

He was like many other people who have sought to do another some irreparable injury. He hated his blameless victim because, having overreached himself, the wrong had at last rebounded upon himself, and he was the chief sufferer from his own folly.

Gentle Marion Vance had done him no conscious wrong. She had loved and trusted him; she would have devoted her life to him and his interests. But, although he had not really succeeded in destroying her, and entailing lasting dishonor upon her name, yet she had suffered for the time as if he had accomplished his purpose.

But the truth had triumphed at last, as it always does. He stood exposed in all his baseness; his evil doings were revealed, and the shame and injury done to himself were far greater than he had ever dreamed of bringing upon her. Marion at last stood vindicated before the world as the pure and innocent girl she was, while the whole black catalogue of Sumner Dalton's guilt was now sweeping down like an avalanche upon him, threatening to ruin and crush him utterly.

He might live ten, twenty, even thirty years longer, but his treachery would follow him forever; it would never be forgotten by any one who had known of it. Henceforth he would be a marked man, and one never more to be trusted or honored.

"Stay!" Mr. Dalton suddenly exclaimed, as if a new thought had struck him. "The legal husband of Marion Vance would have rights there even now. I will see to this matter. Who has been master at Wycliffe all these years?"

"Warrenton Fairfield Vance, my mother's father, has ruled there until his death, which occurred only a few months ago," Earle answered, quietly, but reading at once what was passing in the man's mind.

"And who came into the property then?" he demanded, eagerly.

"A cousin of my mother's—Paul Tressalia by name.

"Zounds! Girl, do you hear that?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, very much astonished, and turning to Editha. "But——" he began again, with a perplexed look.

"But he is not master there now," Earle interrupted, calmly.

"Ah!" Mr. Dalton uttered, leaning forward with breathless interest, half expecting what was to follow.

"I am now the acknowledged Marquis of Wycliffe and Viscount Wayne," Earle said.

"Have you proved your claim? Was it not contested? How——,"

Mr. Dalton was very much excited, so much so that he trembled visibly, and leaned back, white and weak, in his chair.

"I have proved my claim; it was not contested," the young man began. "When I first discovered that my mother's marriage was valid, and that I was the rightful heir to Wycliffe, I thought I would go at once and compel my grandfather to acknowledge me as such. But he had been so stern and cruel to my mother that I recoiled from him. I was under age, and I knew he would be apt to deal sternly with me also, and demand implicit obedience to him. I knew if I went to him he would in all probability refuse to allow me to follow the course I had marked out for myself. So I resolved I would never cross the threshold over which my mother had been so relentlessly driven until I had either discovered the man who had so wronged her, and could tell the marquis that I had found him and proved that he had legally bound himself to her, or until his death, when of course it would become necessary that I should reveal my identity. So I began my lonely wanderings upon a very uncertain mission. I discovered upon inquiry that a George Sumner had been studying at a certain German university. I immediately repaired thither, and found, upon examining the books, that he was an American from a certain town in the State of New York. And now allow me to ask why you registered only a part of your name instead of the whole?" Earle asked, pausing.

"It does not matter," Mr. Dalton muttered, uneasily, and with a rising flush.

It might as well be mentioned here what Earle afterward discovered, that he became implicated in a very shameful affair while studying in a noted college of his own country, and was expelled in deep disgrace, whereupon he had immediately gone abroad to finish his course in the German university referred to.

Fearing that there might be other American students there who knew of the disgraceful affair in which he had been a leader, he resolved not to give his whole name, and thus escaped being a marked man.

He accordingly gave only his first two names, and though

there were, as he feared, other students there who did know of the escapade connected with his previous college life, yet they never suspected that George Sumner and George Dalton, as he had before been known, were the same person. With a slight curl of his lip at the man's reply, Earle continued:

"As soon as I found he was an American, I resolved to come to America and prosecute my search. But I was a poor boy; I had refused the aid which my grandfather had hitherto given my mother—I could not use the money of a man who had so long disowned me, even though it might belong to me by right—and so I was obliged to do something for my support. That was how I came to be in Mr. Forrester's employ; and every holiday, every spare day that he would grant me, I devoted to my search. I procured the directories of several cities, and studied up all the Sumners they contained, but could find none, upon seeking them out, who answered to the George Sumner that my dying mother had described to me.

"I never thought of such a thing as you being the man I was seeking; had I even suspected it, I never should have had to serve those three years in that miserable prison; for, as I told you before, it was while searching for you that I became entangled in that robbery. You, it seems, knew, during the greater part of my imprisonment, of the relation I sustained toward you. It would seem as if common humanity would have prompted you to make some effort for my release, or, at least, for a mitigation of my sentence; but instead, you sought to deprive me of the only comfort I had, for I am convinced that it was you who intercepted all the flowers and kind messages which I should otherwise have received."

Earle fixed his stern glance upon Mr. Dalton as he said this, and knew by the guilty way his eyes fell that he was correct in his surmise.

"I do not wonder at it, now that I know something of your nature, but it will only be an added thorn planted in your pillow of remorse, as will also be the injuries which you sought to do me after my release, and in the end you will be the worst sufferer. But in spite of your every effort I conquered. I was beginning to make for myself a name and reputation, when I read in a paper of the death of the Marquis of Wycliffe. He had been dead some time, for this notice was only an item gleaned from European news, and reported in connection with the fact that Mr. Tressalia, of Newport fame, had succeeded to his vast

property. I knew then that I must attend to my claim at once, and I immediately left for Europe. I found Mr. Tressalia, as I expected, already established as the Marquis of Wycliffe; but, like the noble man that he is, when he found that I was the rightful heir he relinquished everything and kindly assisted me in establishing my identity. Then, feeling that the change in my prospects would be sufficient to make you waive all objections regarding me, I left my affairs in his hands, and returned for Editha——”

Earle suddenly stopped appalled—he could not go on. All his dreams of happiness were at an end now; that hour had crushed his every hope—Editha Dalton was his half-sister, and he must never dare to think of her again as becoming his wife.

But, God forgive him! he could never love her as a sister.

His great heart swelled within him with agony at the thought; the veins upon his forehead filled out hard and full, while the perspiration gathered upon his face, and, rolling off, dropped upon the floor.

Editha Dalton his half-sister!

He could not realize it, and it was the bitterest blow his life had ever known. How could he live all the long years that were before him, with the sin of this undying love clinging to him?

Now he knew something of what Paul Tressalia must have suffered from his unrequited affection.

Paul Tressalia!

The thought of him thrilled him with a sharper, fiercer pain.

Perhaps in time, now that Editha was lost to him, he might succeed in winning her.

It was too much for him to bear silently, and, bowing his head upon the table near which he had sat down, he groaned aloud.

Sumner Dalton smiled at the sound, while a cunning, sinister expression crept into his eyes. It did him good to know that Earle could suffer, and his strange hatred of him on his mother's account made him inwardly exult over the sight.

But he had been revolving matters of importance in his mind while Earle was talking.

He had been immeasurably startled and mortified to learn how the rector of St. John's chapel at Winchelsea had outwitted him, and fearfully angry and irritated when he realized how he had missed all the luxuries and magnificence of Wycliffe for so many years.

If he had only known that the marriage had been legal when he had opened that package and discovered that Earle was his son and heir of all the Marquis of Wycliffe's great possessions, how differently he would have conducted himself.

If he could but have known what that piece of cardboard contained—if he could have read all this evidence then, and assured himself of its truth, as he would have taken pains to have done, how eagerly he would have worked for Earle's release, and canceled every evidence of the evil passion within him. He would then have made peace with him, and have reaped all the advantages which the father of so noted a person as the future Marquis of Wycliffe would be would naturally enjoy.

But a faint hope animated him that perhaps it might not be too late, after all.

Earle was his son—that fact was established beyond a doubt—and he had said he would never stoop to anything like revenge; he had once said that he would not avail himself of the slightest advantage to do him an injury; he had also said that he desired to put in practice the mandate, "Love your enemies, do good to those who despitefully injure you." If that was the case he would doubtless be ready to forgive him for all the wrong he had done him in the past, and if he expressed sorrow in a proper manner he would doubtless receive him into favor, and he could after all be able to worm himself into Wycliffe and be looked up to and honored as the father of the young marquis. It was strange that no feelings of guilt or shame restrained him. He did not hate Marion one whit the less, nor Earle either, because he henceforth might be able to enjoy what had so long been denied him.

But he was resolved to make the fact of their relationship serve him a good turn; he would get all he could out of him, gratify every selfish desire, accept every good thing that he could possibly worm out of him, and let all the former wrong he had done him go for naught.

He still hated him, I say, as such natures always hate those who have risen triumphant above them, and he would have gloried in it if he could have hurled him from his proud position and made the whole world despise and hate him likewise; but, as long as there was any prospect of advantage to be gained for himself, he must hide it and put on the semblance of regret and future good-will.

"You say that your claim is indisputably established at

Wycliffe?" he asked, after he had thought these things well over.

"Yes," Earle answered, lifting his haggard face, with a heavy sigh; "everything was so clearly proved that no one could gainsay it."

"That is exceedingly fortunate. When shall you return?"

"Immediately," Earle said, with white lips.

"How did you find the estates and rent-roll?" Mr. Dalton asked, with another cunning gleam in his eyes.

"In a very flourishing condition," Earle answered briefly.

He was beginning to mistrust toward what these inquiries were tending.

"But what will you do? You have never had any experience in managing so large a property."

"I can learn, sir."

"I know; but that would be so tedious, and you are liable to make many mistakes. You need some one older and wiser than yourself to advise you."

Mr. Dalton hesitates a moment and leans nearer Earle, eagerly searching his handsome face. But Earle sits pale and quiet, knowing, nevertheless, what is to follow, and conscious also of what the result will be.

"If—if," began Mr. Dalton, with some hesitation, "you could be—ahem!—persuaded to—to overlook the past—if we could make a treaty to bury the hatchet, and be at peace. I—I really regret, you know, all that has gone by—and if we could come to some sort of terms, I—would consent to return to Wycliffe with you, and give you the benefit of my superior judgment and advice."

Such amazing disinterestedness, such unblushing assurance was absolutely startling.

A quick, hot flush mounted to Earle's brow, and for a moment his lips trembled as if scathing and terrible words rushed unbidden there for utterance.

Then he lifted his dark eyes and fixed them in a quiet, steady gaze upon the man opposite him.

Sumner Dalton could not meet that gaze unmoved. In spite of his hardihood, a blush of confusion mantled his face, and his guilty look told that all sense of shame was not yet quite dead within him.

"When I was simply Earle Wayne," he began, without removing his glance, "a poor boy working for his daily bread, I was considered unworthy of your notice. When misfortune overtook me and I became a criminal in the sight of the law, even after you knew that it was your son who had been sentenced to hard labor for three years, you

made no effort to help me—you did not come near me to offer me one kind and sympathizing word even. When your daughter was kind to me, and I dared to feel a tender regard for her, you resolved to crush me. When a kind friend remembered me on his death-bed, you would have wrested from me the comparatively small sum that he had bequeathed to me out of his abundance. You have scorned, insulted, and wronged me in every possible way. You have even owned to an implacable enmity toward me. For all this I could forgive you, if convinced that you were truly repentant, since it was against me alone that all your malice and hatred were turned; but for the slight, the scorn, and the misery which you plotted, and, to all intents and purposes, executed against my gentle and innocent mother, I cannot. I have no right to forgive you. By your own wickedness and folly you have forfeited all right to be acknowledged as either her husband or my father. Mr. Dalton, *you* can never cross the threshold of Wycliffe."

He had listened to Earle with a sinking heart, and when he concluded he fairly gnashed his teeth from anger and disappointment.

Earle had spoken very quietly. There was not the slightest excitement visible in his manner, but every word had in it the ring of an unalterable purpose.

"Do you mean it?" Mr. Dalton asked, in low, repressed tones.

"Most emphatically, sir; *you* can never enter the home from which my mother was driven in disgrace on account of your baseness and treachery."

Mr. Dalton sat in sullen thought for awhile. How he hated this calm, proud young man, from whom, even though he was his own son, he knew he had no right to expect anything of respect or consideration.

But the things of the world were desperate with him just at present, and he controlled his fierce passion to make one last appeal.

It was true that Editha still had her fortune, and while she still remained single he knew he need not want for anything within reason; still he could not in any way control her property, and all he received had to come through her hands, which, to a man so proud and spirited as himself, was, to say the least, humiliating.

But if he could but once lay hand upon the overflowing coffers of Wycliffe his future would be one long day of luxury and pleasure, and, having been wronged out of his share for so many years, he would feel no compunctions

about scattering with lavish hand the shining treasure of the house of Vance.

"I will be frank with you," he said, trying to speak in a conciliatory tone. "I am a ruined man. I have been speculating, and every dollar of my handsome property is gone. Even my house and furniture are mortgaged, and liable to be taken from me any day. I say again I regret the past sincerely;" and so he did, so much of it as had served to keep him out of Wycliffe, though no part of his sin. "I wish to be at peace with you, but if you turn against me now, I must come down to the level of the common herd."

To the level of the common herd! How the words galled Earle. He would sink to the level of the common herd, of which he had once believed his mother was one, and so it had not mattered if he had ruined her.

Bitter words arose to his lips; his heart was full of scorn and indignation, but he controlled it, and answered, as calmly as before, but with an unmoved face:

"I regret that you have been so unfortunate—speculating is very precarious business, but I can never consent to your becoming an inmate of Wycliffe, or of the home where I reside. It would not be right that I should overlook the past and treat you as if you had been guilty of no wrong; you have no right to expect me to entertain anything of either respect or affection for you, even though the same blood may flow in our veins—you have forfeited all right and title to any such feelings. I must, on the other hand, frankly confess to an aversion for you, but I would harbor no ill-will, I would do you no injury even though I cannot tolerate your presence."

"Is this your creed?" burst forth Mr. Dalton, unable to control himself any longer. "Is this your boasted forgiveness of your enemies—your 'good-will toward men?'"

"You do not *wish* to be forgiven—you have no *real sorrow* for your sin. If any effort of mine could serve to make you truly repentant before God, I would not spare it. If you were sick and needy, I would minister to you, for my Master's sake, as I would to any other stranger. But your feelings toward me are unchanged—were it not for what I *possess*, you would not even now make these overtures to me, and all idea of our residing under the same roof, or of sharing anything in common, is entirely out of the question. Still, I repeat, I bear you no malice, or cherish no spirit of revenge toward you, and to prove it, since you have been so unfortunate, I will make over to you, if Editha

does not object, the ten thousand dollars which Mr. Forrester bequeathed to me, and which has remained untouched since she invested it for me. The interest of that will give you a comfortable living during the remainder of your life, if you do not touch the principal."

A perfect tornado of wrath raged in Sumner Dalton's breast at this calmly spoken but unalterable decision.

"So you will deign to give me, *your father*, a paltry ten thousand out of your exhaustless revenue!" he sneered, with exceeding bitterness.

"I owe you *nothing* on the score of relationship," Earle answered, coldly; "and as for the 'paltry ten thousand,' allow me to remind you that you did not consider it in that light when Mr. Forrester bequeathed it to me."

Again Mr. Dalton flushed.

How all his sins, one after another, were being visited upon himself.

With a fearful look of rage and hate convulsing his features, he leaned toward Earle and hissed:

"I would crush you this instant if I could; there is nothing of all the world's ills too horrible for me to wish upon you, and I will yet be revenged upon you for what I have suffered this day. I will yet make you feel the power of my hate!" and he glanced darkly toward Editha as he said this.

Earle's eyes involuntarily followed his look, and the bitterness of death seemed upon him as he realized that they two would have a life-long sorrow to bear.

A sudden fear startled him, as Mr. Dalton spoke, that he contemplated injury to her in order to carry out the revenge he meant to wreak upon him.

"You will be very careful *what* you do," he said, with a sternness that cowed the man in spite of his bravado; "you will not forget that you occupy a very delicate position even now, and that I have it in my power to make your own future very uncomfortable."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Dalton, with glittering eyes.

"I mean that if I choose I can make you answerable to the law; for, while one wife was living, you married another, and are liable at any time to be prosecuted for bigamy."

Sumner Dalton swore a fearful oath, his white face testifying to the dreadful punishment which anything of such a nature would be to him, while a low, heart-rending moan burst at the same moment from Editha.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"IS THERE NO WAY OF ESCAPE?"

EARLE started at that sound. His mind was so intent upon dealing with the strange man who claimed to be his father that he had not considered how his words might wound Editha, and he now blamed himself severely for having allowed these disclosures to be made in her presence. What must the poor girl have suffered as she listened and realized her own position, and all the wrong of which her father was guilty?

He had proved that her father had been legally married to his mother, consequently he, who had hitherto been regarded as a child of dishonor, was now without taint, and entitled to one of the proudest positions in the world. But in the heat and excitement of explaining all this, he had not stopped to consider that his own glory must necessarily arise out of the ruins of her life.

After Mr. Dalton had failed in his search for Marion Vance he returned to the United States, where, shortly after, he had met and married the sister of Richard Forrester, who was reputed to be quite wealthy.

Disappointment awaited him in this, however, for Miss Forrester possessed but a small sum in her own right.

But matters could not be helped, and the chagrined husband made the most of it, invested his wife's small fortune carefully, and, by earnest attention to business, made money steadily for several years.

Report said, also, that Richard Forrester gave him a handsome lift, and it was not long before he was reputed to be the possessor of a large fortune.

But, of course, his marriage with Miss Forrester was not legal, although he had confidently believed it to be so until this very day; and Earle condemned himself for many things that he had said, after being reminded by that low moan of how much Editha had been made to suffer.

Mr. Dalton saw how it wounded him, and laughed maliciously, whereupon Earle turned upon him almost savagely.

"Do you mean me to understand that you will wound me by venting your malice upon her? Let me assure you that if I know of your willfully causing her even one moment's unhappiness, I will have no mercy on you," he said.

Mr. Dalton chuckled.

"You are really fond of—ah—your *sister*; it is really

pleasant to see such unity in a family. I trust you will always be as fond of your—*sister*."

He seemed to take a satanic delight in repeating the word. He knew that it fell upon both their hearts like the blow from a hammer.

"My sister! God forgive me, she *is* my sister; but I do not love her *as such*," Earle groaned, as he wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

This was music to Sumner Dalton's ears, but he knew it would not do to trespass too far; so, rising, he said, with the most consummate coolness:

"Since it would not sound well for a man in your position to allow his father to suffer for the necessities of life, I will consent to accept your offer of that ten thousand, and you can make it over to me with as little delay as possible. And now I will bid you good-morning, leaving you and your *sister* to talk over your future prospects and comfort one another as best you can."

With a low, echoing, mocking laugh, he left the room and those two wretched young people were alone.

In the exceeding bitterness of his soul Earle again dropped his head upon the table, and a long, long silence ensued.

Editha lay perfectly still upon the sofa.

At last Earle arose and went and knelt down beside her.

"Editha!" he said; and it is not possible to convey any idea of the pain crowded into the one word.

Only a low moan answered him.

"Editha," he said again, almost wildly, "I would have saved you from this had it been possible."

She turned her face up to him at this in speechless misery. She had shed no tears over what she had heard; the horror of it had seemed to scorch and burn them up at their very fountain. Her eyes were heavy, her face perfectly hueless, her lips parched and drawn, her hands hot and burning.

That one look of hers, so piteous and full of anguish, unmanned Earle completely, and, dropping his head upon the pillow beside hers, sob after sob broke from him.

At the sight of his suffering, woman-like, she forgot her own in a measure.

She put up her hot hand and laid it caressingly against his cheek, and cried:

"Earle—Earle—don't! *I* cannot bear it if *you* give way so. God will help us; He will send no more upon us than He is willing to give us strength to bear. But, oh!" she added, wildly, "that I should have to call *such* a man *father*."

"My darling, that is a sorrow that we share in common," Earle answered, with an effort at self-control.

"I am glad mamma is dead. I am glad Uncle Richard is dead. How could they have borne this?" Editha moaned.

"Your Uncle Richard would have counseled us what to do, dear; he would have been a help to us," Earle replied, feeling deeply the need of such a friend as Richard Forrester would have been.

"I believe he would have killed papa if he had lived to know of all this. I have been told that his temper was fearful when once aroused," Editha said, with a shudder.

"He is not here, and we must take counsel of each other. My darling we have some stern facts to look in the face. All——"

His courage failed him for the moment, and it seemed as if his reason was forsaking him.

After a while he went on:

"All our former hopes are crushed and destroyed. Oh, why were we ever permitted to love each other as we have done, only to suffer thus? But, Editha, I cannot—I do not feel that I ought to go back and leave you here with *him*. Will you come with me to Wycliffe and share my home—your brother's home?"

She put him away from her with a gesture of despair.

A cry of bitterness rang through the room, and then, as if all power of self-control had deserted her, she cried out:

"No, no, no! Earle, how can you torture me with such a proposal? Go away—hide from me—put the sea between us, until—until *I can learn to love you less*."

And the poor, tired, almost bursting heart found relief in a flood of scalding tears.

Earle was glad to see her weep, though every word had been fresh torture to him. He did not check her, but only knelt by her, gently smoothing her shining hair, and wishing he could have borne all this great grief alone.

How could he bear to leave her? How could he put the ocean between them! How could he bear to let long years go by and not look upon her face, perhaps *never* see her again? She would not be happy with her father, he knew, after what she had learned to-day. She had no other friends to whom to go, and what would become of her?"

She repelled the idea of making Wycliffe her home, where she would be obliged to see him every day, and strive to conquer the love which now she had no right to give him. And his own heart told him that it would be a burden too heavy for either of them to bear.

Something told him that he could never love her after the quiet fashion of a brother. His heart had gone out to her in the first strong, deep passion of his manhood, and he could no more control it than he could control the wind that blew.

All this he thought over as she lay there in the abandonment of her grief, and he knew that she had judged rightly; they must be separated, or their sorrow would wear them both out in a little while. He must go back to Wycliffe and take up his duties there, and she must choose for herself what she would do here.

Her sobs grew less violent after awhile, and at last he said, with an effort to speak calmly:

"Editha, I will do whatever you say; but it seems to me as if all the world from this hour will be palled in deepest gloom—as if nothing could ever look bright or beautiful again. I came back to you so joyous—so proud of the position that was mine to offer you; and now every hope is crushed. Oh, what shall we do? How are we to bear it?" he groaned.

"You must go away—back to England," she said, in a shaking, weakened voice. "I cannot bear it if you stay here; neither can I go to Wycliffe. Don't you see we could not bear *that*? We must live apart, and strive to forget if we can. Perhaps when long years have passed, if we live, and we have not seen each other, we may be able to love each other less."

"God forbid! And yet the sin of it will crush me," he cried, despairingly. "I cannot forget—I do not want to forget—I will *not*. Oh, Editha, why are we permitted to be tortured thus?"

"To teach us, perhaps, that earthly idols are but dust, and God is supreme. He has said we must put no other in *His* place," she whispered, with a solemnity that awed him.

"Have *you* loved *me* like that?" he asked.

"Hush!" she answered, with a shiver, and laying her fingers gently on his lips. "I must not tell you *how much*. We have no right to talk of that any more. I want you to bid me good-by now, Earle, and let it be a long, long good-by, too."

"My darling, I *cannot*; it is too, too cruel," he moaned; and, forgetting everything but his deep and mighty love for her, he gathered her into his arms and clasped her with such rebellious strength that she was powerless in his embrace.

"Earle," she said, with a calmness born of despair, yet speaking authoritatively, "you must let me go."

He instantly released her—he could not disobey her when she spoke in that tone, but the look on his face made her cry out with pain.

"Forgive me," she almost sobbed. "I would not wound you, but we must end this for the sake of both. Will you do as I wish?" Will you go back to Wycliffe at once?"

"I will do anything that you bid me, Editha," he answered, in a hollow tone, but with a look such as she hoped never to see again on any mortal face.

"Thank you, Earle—I do bid you go—it is right—it will be best, and—and——"

She had risen, and was standing before him, looking almost as wan and ghastly as she had looked on that night when he had found her in the power of Tom Drake.

She had stopped suddenly, catching her breath, and she reeled like a person drunken with wine; but, pressing her hand to her side, as if to still her fierce heart-throbs she strove to go on, though every word came with a pant:

"And, Earle, do not mourn—do not grieve any more than you can help; it would not be right—you have a noble career before you, and you must do honor to the name you bear——"

"What are honors to me? What is anything in the world worth to me *now*?" he interrupted, hoarsely.

"You must conquer that reckless spirit, Earle—try not to think of me any more than it is possible to help; I shall do very well, I hope. I shall stay with papa, and strive to win him to better things."

Her pale lips quivered as she thought how dreary the world would be when he was gone, and how thankless the task she had set herself to accomplish.

After a moment she quietly drew off the beautiful ring he had placed upon her finger and held it out to him.

"I must not wear this any more," she said, brokenly; "it means too much to me, and I have loved it so dearly for the sake of what it meant, and I do not wish to even see anything that can remind me of the—the happiness I have lost. Take it and put it away, Earle; but if—if——"

She caught her breath quickly, while he felt as if he were turning to stone.

"If ever," she began again, with a great effort, but looking so white and deathly that Earle feared she would drop dead at his feet—"if ever in the future you meet any one whom you think will make you happy, tell her all about our sorrow, Earle, and give her this with—my blessing."

"Oh, Heaven! Editha, do you wish to drive me mad?" he groaned.

"Dear Earle, it is hard—I cannot tell you *how* hard it is for me to say this, but I know that what I tell you will be right for you to do, and—I do want you to be happy."

"Happy! Do you not know that that word will mock me all the remainder of my life?" he cried, with exceeding bitterness.

"I hope not, Earle;" and her sweet lips quivered like a grieved child's.

"Do you think you will ever know happiness again, Editha?" Earle asked, almost fiercely, and yet her sad face smote him for the question.

"If it is God's will," she answered, with a weariness that pierced him to his heart's core; but in her soul she knew that apart from him the world would never hold any charm for her again.

"There are some things in life," she went on, with mournful sweetness, after a moment, "that we cannot understand—this trial of ours is one of them. I remember reading somewhere that

'Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break,'

and if that is so, we are not alone in our sorrow; perhaps all will be well in the end, and we shall live to realize it—let us trust that it may be so. But, Earle, you have a beautiful home, and probably there are long years of useful life before you, but there can be no comfort in a housesold without a skilful hand to beautify and direct. Do not forget what I say—remember that I even wish it, should the time ever come when you can realize it; and now, Earle," reaching out her hands with a sob that seemed wrung from her against her will, "good-by—God ever bless and keep you."

His hands dropped suddenly, and the ring rolled to his feet; he had not taken it—he had seemed to have no power; and she, feeling that she could bear no more, turned as if to leave him.

He had stood like one stunned while she was speaking. He could not seem to realize that she really meant this for her last, long farewell; but, as she turned from him, he cried out suddenly, in a voice of agony:

"Editha! oh, my lost love, do not leave me thus!"

She stopped, her head drooping upon her bosom, her hands hanging listlessly by her side.

He sprang to her, and, forgetting everything but the pain of the moment, he drew her passionately to his breast.

"Editha—my happiness—my love—all that is dearest and best in the world, how can you go away from me so? I cannot bear it. I will not believe this fearful thing that is to rob us of all our bright future."

She lay resistless in his embrace now; it was for the last time, she thought, even if she had not been too weak to move.

"Tell me, Editha, is there no way of escape? *Must* we live out our dreary future, this poisoned arrow corroding in our hearts? Ah! if this terrible tale could be refuted."

"But it cannot, Earle; there is no way but to bear it patiently," she breathed.

"No, there is no other way, for I *know* that that man is my father, and that fact destroys our every hope. It is hard, my beloved; let me call you so once more; let me hold you close for the last time; let me kiss these dear lips, and touch this shining hair, and then I will go away as you wish. I will not add one pang to what I know you already suffer. Heaven bless you, my weary, stricken one—my lost love."

With one strong arm he held her close against his almost bursting heart, while with his other hand he drew back the shining head until he could look down into the beautiful face that he felt might perhaps be looking his very last upon.

His lips lingered upon her hair, touched her forehead with tremulous tenderness, and then, with a sob wrung from the depths of his soul, he pressed one long, passionate kiss upon her lips, gently released her, stooped to pick up the ring she had wished him to have, and then strode from the room.

A fortnight later Earle Wayne had returned to Wycliffe sad, almost broken-hearted, and, at twenty-five, deeming life a burden too heavy to be borne.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

EDITHA DALTON and her father went to Newport—he to get all the pleasure out of life that he could by mingling in the sports of the gay world and spending his daughter's money, she to bear with what submission she could the

weary routine in which she had no heart, and which was but a mockery to her.

Earle had, faithful to his word, made over the long disputed ten thousand dollars to Mr. Dalton, and this, together with Editha's handsome income which she tacitly yielded up to him, enabled him to live like a prince.

But people wondered to see how the brightness had faded from the fair girl's life.

She took no interest in the pleasure and frivolities of the fashionable watering-place.

She would not attend their parties and social gatherings, but wandered alone by the sea, or sat in seclusion of her own room, pale, sad, and silent, thinking ever of the one so dear, who at her bidding had put the ocean between them.

Her rebellious heart had refused to banish him from the place so long his own, or yield up one tithe of the love which she had lavished upon him.

The very name of brother, applied to him, made her shudder with repulsion, and the thought of being his sister made her cry out with despair, and grow sick and faint with horror.

Mr. Dalton, to his credit be it said, after Earle was well out of the way, changed his course and treated her with great gentleness and kindness.

Perhaps he felt a thrill of remorse as he saw her day by day growing so frail and slight, and bearing with such sad patience the sorrow which he had brought upon her.

Perhaps, since we cannot conscientiously attribute really unselfish motives to him, he only realized that she was the goose who brought him the golden eggs, and considered it a matter of policy to conciliate her favor.

Be this as it may, he improved his advantage to the fullest extent.

Money slipped through his fingers like water; he had never seemed so gay, reckless, and intent upon his pleasure before, and more than one old associate remarked that "Mr. Dalton grew fast as he grew old."

But a Nemesis was on his track.

A relentless fate was pursuing him, crying, "No quarter until the mighty one is fallen."

His days of unholy living and revenge, of treachery and wrong, were numbered, though he knew it not, and no spirit of warning whispered that for every evil deed he had done he must soon give an account.

It was a matter of some surprise to Paul Tressalia that Earle should return to England alone.

He had fully expected that he would bring Editha as a bride to Wycliffe, and he had tried to school his own heart to bear it. He saw at once that there was some deep trouble on his mind; no one ever had such heavy hollow eyes, such a worn, haggard face, without some adequate cause. But, as Earle did not offer any explanation for it, he could not question him. And so the days went by, while he began to mature his plans for his own future.

Earle at once entered upon his duties as master of Wycliffe, and was received most heartily by all the adherents of the former marquis, and soon gained an influence and footing in the country which ought to have satisfied the most exacting.

He was *feted* and flattered, quoted, advised, and sought after; but never for a moment did he forget that sad white face that for a few minutes had lain on his breast for the last time, nor the last heart-broken farewell and the low-murmured "God ever bless and keep you."

But the time came when he had to fight another mighty battle with himself.

His hopes for the future had all been destroyed by a single blow; but Paul Tressalia still loved Editha, he knew, and there might be a ray of hope for him.

The question arose within him, "Ought he not to tell him of the change in the relations which existed between Editha and himself, and if there was the shadow of a possibility of his winning her love, ought he not to allow him to put it to the test?"

One day he sought him, with a pale, worn face.

He had conquered a mighty foe—himself.

He remembered that Editha had once told him, when speaking of her refusal of Mr. Tressalia's offer of marriage, that "she had never suffered more at the thought of giving pain than she did in refusing him."

Some one has written, "Pity melts the mind to love," and perchance, out of her sympathy for him, something of affection might arise, and a life of quiet happiness be gained for her as well as for his cousin.

"Paul, I have something of importance to communicate to you," he said, coming to the point at once.

"Say on, then; are you in trouble? Can I do anything for you?" Mr. Tressalia asked, with an anxious glance into the worn face.

"No, there is nothing that you or any one else can do for me; it is to give you a chance in the race after happi-

ness that I come to you," Earle answered, with something of bitterness in his tone.

"I do not understand you," he returned, a flush rising to his cheek.

"Do you still love Editha Dalton?" Earle asked, setting his teeth to keep back a rebellious groan.

"Do you need to ask me that question?" Paul Tressalia returned, reproachfully, his face suddenly paling now. "I must always love her."

"Then go and win her if you can; the way is open; there is nothing to hinder you," Earle said, wiping the cold sweat from his face.

His cousin looked at him in blank astonishment, wondering if he was losing his mind that he should make such a statement as that, or if it was some lover's quarrel that had driven Earle home in such despair.

Earle, without waiting for a reply, proceeded to relate to him the story of Editha's relationship to himself.

"It is killing me," he said, when he had finished. "I rebel every day against the cruel fate that has separated us, for I love her only as a man can love the woman who should be his wife, and shall love her thus until I die. You love her, also; and perhaps, if you can win her, you both may yet know much of domestic peace. If I cannot conquer my sinful heart I may die, and you will then regain what you have lost, while Editha will, after all, be mistress of Wycliffe."

"Earle, do not speak thus," Mr. Tressalia said, with deep emotion, for the wild bitterness and misery of his cousin grieved him. "I was glad to relinquish Wycliffe to you when I knew that it rightly belonged to you. I do not covet it, and I would not have matters in this respect other than as they are. I hope, too, that you may live to see a lusty heir growing up to take it after you. But this is a strange story you have told me—Editha your half-sister! Mr. Dalton your father!"

"Yes, it is even so, though I would gladly give every acre of my inheritance to have it proved otherwise."

"You must resemble your mother's family alone, then, and she her mother, for there is not a single point of resemblance between you to testify to any such relationship."

"I do not know as to that. I only know that the *facts exist* to prove it," Earle said, dejectedly.

"Poor child! she loved you so devotedly, she was so proud of you, and she must have suffered also. I would that I could give you both back your lost happiness. Is it not

strange that only out of the ruin of either your hopes or mine happiness can come to either of us?" Mr. Tressalia said, regretfully.

"It is ruined whether you win or not, and yet I go on sinning day after day, loving her as madly as ever," Earle cried, clenching his hands in his pain. "Go, go," he added; "when she is once your wife, I may be able to gain something of peace, or the semblance of it."

Paul Tressalia needed no second bidding, though it must be confessed he was not elated by any very strong hope of success.

His heart told him that if Editha loved with the same intensity as Earle, it would be as enduring as eternity, and he could never hope to win her as his wife.

Still he could not rest content until he had once more put his fate to the test, and, with a tender though sad parting from his noble-hearted kinsman, he once more crossed the broad Atlantic.

He reached Newport in the height of its gayety, and was enthusiastically welcomed by his old acquaintances.

To his surprise Mr. Dalton received him with great coolness, surmising at once the errand upon which he had come.

He had discovered, if others had not, that Paul Tressalia was no longer "heir to great expectations," and he was not at all anxious now either that Editha should marry.

She was ill, failing daily and hourly, as every one could see, and many predicted a rapid decline and an early death unless some change for the better occurred soon.

Mr. Dalton shook his head sadly and sighed heavily, as a fond and anxious parent should do, whenever interviewed upon the subject, but secretly he was calculating his chances of falling heir to her snug fortune.

"She is my daughter," he would say to himself, rubbing his hands together in that peculiar way he had. "If she dies unmarried and without a will—and I don't think she has thought of such a thing as that—of course, being her nearest blood relation, I shall inherit;" and he always ended these confidential cogitations with a chuckle, accompanied by a look of infinite cunning.

So it will be readily seen that Mr. Dalton had no idea of encouraging Mr. Tressalia as a suitor, especially as he could no longer offer her any peculiar advantages.

But that young man was shocked at the change in the fair girl. The laughing eyes were sad and lusterless now; the rounded cheeks had fallen away, leaving great hollows where before had been a delicate sea-shell bloom; the scarlet

lips, which had ever been wreathed in sunniest smiles, wore a mournful droop, and were sad, blue, and drawn with pain.

She greeted him, however, with more than her accustomed cordiality, and listened eagerly while he told her all about Earle and the magnificent inheritance that had fallen to him. Any one who could tell her aught concerning her dear one was doubly welcome.

She was never weary of hearing about Wycliffe, and all the noble ancestors of the noble house of Vance. She took a strange, sad pleasure in the mournful history of the unfortunate Marion, and Paul Tressalia, seeing it, gratified her as far as he was able, though he could but realize that he was making no progress in her affections.

"I am afraid Newport does not agree with you, Miss Dalton," he remarked one day, as he came upon her sitting listless and dejected under a tree near the sea-shore, her eyes fixed dreamily upon the restless waves, a look of pain contracting her fair forehead.

"I do not enjoy Newport," she said, with a sigh; "at least the gay hurry and bustle that we are constantly in."

"Then why not go to some more quiet place? Why not go to some farm among the mountains, where the air is drier and purer? I do not like to see you looking so ill," he returned, with visible anxiety.

"Papa is not content unless he can be where there is considerable excitement," she answered, wearily; "and I don't know as it matters much," she added, with a faraway look.

"It does matter," Paul Tressalia burst forth, indignantly; "if this air is too heavy and bracing for you, you should not be allowed to remain here another day. Do you not see that your health is failing? You are weaker and thinner even than when I came, a week ago."

She smiled faintly, and, lifting her thin hand, held it up between her eyes and the sun.

It shone almost transparent, while every bone, vein, and cord could be distinctly traced.

With a little sign she let it drop again into her lap, and, turning to her companion, said, with a grave, thoughtful look on her face:

"I wonder what the spiritual body will be like?"

"Miss Dalton—Editha, what made you think of that?" he asked, startled by her words, yet knowing very well what had made her think of it—that little hand had more of a spiritual than a material look about it.

"One cannot help thinking of it when the physical body

is so frail and so easily destroyed. When one is putting off the mortal, one naturally is curious to know what the immortal is like;" and she spoke as calmly as if she were merely talking of changing a dress.

"Editha, you are not—you do not think you are so ill as that?" he cried, almost awe-stricken.

"Yes, I hope so; what have I to live for now?" she asked, turning her sad eyes upon him, and his heart sank in despair within him. "You know all my trouble," she added, a moment after; "you know how all my hopes were crushed. I am, as I might say, entirely alone in the world; I have hardly a friend on whom to depend, no one to comfort and cheer me, and I have no right even to the name I bear. Do you think that life holds out very much that is pleasant to me? I am young to die, and I cannot say that I do not dread the thought of being laid away and forgotten, and yet I know it would cure my pain—there is no pain beyond, you know. If I had anything to do, if I might be of any comfort or use to *any* one, if I had even *one* friend who needed me, I should feel differently."

The sadness and hopelessness of her tone and words almost made him weep in spite of his manhood.

He threw himself down upon the grass beside her, with a low cry.

"Editha, there *is*; I need you; my heart has never ceased to cry out for you; my life is miserable and aimless without you. Come to me and comfort me, and let me try to win back the light in your eyes, the color to your cheeks and lips, and nurse you back to health. I do not ask, I do not *expect*, that you can learn to love me at once as you *have* loved, but if you will only let me take care of you, give *me* the right to love *you* all I wish, I do believe there may be something of peace for you yet even in this world. But I *cannot* see you die while you are so young and bright. Be my wife, Editha, and let me take you away from this noise and tumult where you can regain your health, and the world will not seem so dark to you then."

The young girl was seized with a violent trembling while he was speaking; she shook and shivered with nervousness and excitement, as if some icy blast from a snow-clad mountain had swept down upon her, chilling her through.

A bright hectic flush tinged either cheek, and her eyes, no longer listless, glowed with a brilliancy that was almost dazzling. Never while in perfect health had Paul Tres-salia seen her so strangely beautiful as she was at this moment, and yet it was with a beauty that made his heart

tremble with a terrible fear. With almost the impulse of a child, she reached out both her hands to him as he ceased speaking.

But he knew instinctively that it was not a gesture of assent, though he clasped them involuntarily, and started, to find how hot and feverish they were.

"Mr. Tressalia," she said, excitedly, "I know how true and noble you are, and I know, too, that you love me with a deep, pure love. I know that you would be very tender and indulgent to me, and never allow me to know a sorrow that you could shield me from. But I cannot be your wife—I cannot be anybody's wife—and I should only add sin to sin if I should grant your request, for I can never for a moment cease to love Earle in a way that I should not. It is that that is eating my life away—let me confess it to you, and perhaps it will help me to bear it better. I know that I ought to trample upon every tendril of affection that is reaching out after him, but I cannot; my love is stronger than I, and this constant inward warfare is fast wearing me out. Oh, if you would simply be my friend, and let me talk to you freely like this, and never speak to me of love again, it would be such a comfort to me."

She paused a moment for breath, and then continued:

"I can trust you; I have confidence in you as I have in no other in this land. Mr. Tressalia, *will* you be my friend, strong and true, and *only that*, for the time that I, may need you?"

There was intense yearning in her look and tone. She did need just such a friend, strong and protecting, as he would be, if he could have the strength to endure it.

She could not trust her father; her heart had recoiled from him ever since that day when so much of his evil nature had been revealed to her, and she had no one in whom to confide.

Day and night her busy, excited brain went over all the horror of that last interview with Earle, and day and night she constantly fought the obstinate love in her heart.

It was, as she had said, wearing her life away, and if she could but have some one in whom she could confide, it would be a comfort to her.

But could he stay in her presence, receive her confidences, hear her daily talk of Earle and her blighted hopes, and make no sign of his own sorrow and bitter disappointment?

"Be her friend, strong and true, and *only that*!"

The words were like the knell of doom to him; but she needed him. If she could relieve her heart of something

of its burden, health might return and her life be saved. Was not his duty clear?

"And *never* anything more?" was his last appeal, as he held her hot, trembling hands and looked into her glittering eyes.

"And never anything more," she repeated, after him. "It *cannot* be—*will* you not believe it?" and he knew that so it *must* be.

Back, back into his aching, almost bursting heart he crushed his great love, with every rebellious thought, and all the hopes that had begun to bud anew.

He would do *anything* so that she need not die; he would "trample upon every tendril of affection reaching out after her," as she had said regarding her love for Earle, and become only the true and faithful friend, if by so doing he could comfort and perchance save her.

Something of the struggle that this resolve cost him could be traced in the pale but resolute face, and in his quivering lips.

"Editha," he said, solemnly, as if recording a vow, and still clasping those small hands, "it shall be as you wish; I will never utter another word of love to you; I will be your steadfast friend."

"Oh, thank you!" and, like a weary, grieved child who has restrained its sobs until it could reach the safe and tender shelter of its mother's arms, she dropped her head upon his shoulder and burst into nervous weeping.

He did not move, he did not speak one word to stay her tears, for he knew that they were like the refreshing rain upon the parched and sun-baked earth, and she would be lighter of heart and freer from pain for their flow.

But who shall describe the feelings of his own tried heart as he knelt there with that golden head resting so near it, and from which, for her sake, he had resolved to crush relentlessly every hope for the future?

CHAPTER XXXVI

A NEW CHARACTER

FROM that day Paul Tressalia put every thought of self aside, and devoted himself in delicate, tireless efforts to interest and amuse the frail girl who had such entire confidence and faith in him.

His own heart would have prompted him to go away from all sight and sound of her, but he had promised that he would be her "steadfast friend." There was no particular necessity of his returning to England at present, and, if he could do this unhappy girl any good, he resolved to stay and comfort her until she should need him no longer.

Little by little he drew her away from her own sad thoughts—at least during the day; he could not, of course, know how she spent her nights, whether in refreshing sleep or in sad and morbid brooding.

He took her on long, delightful drives to places where, with a dainty little lunch and a tempting book, they would spend a few quiet hours, and then return, just weary enough to make a rest in a comfortable corner of the broad piazza the most enjoyable thing in the world, while he talked of a hundred entertaining things in the twilight.

By and by he ventured to invite two or three entertaining people to go with them, and such charming little picnics and excursions as they made! They were quiet but cultivated people, and deeply interested in the fading girl, and they exerted themselves in an unobtrusive way to minister to her amusement.

Almost unconsciously Editha was beguiled from her melancholy; little by little the look of tense agony faded from her face; her eyes lost their heavy, despairing look; something of animation and interest replaced her listless, preoccupied manner, and an occasional smile—albeit it was a mournful one—parted her sweet lips, which gradually began to regain something of their original color.

Mr. Tressalia was very wise in all his maneuvers; everything he did was done without any apparent effort, everything moved along smoothly and naturally, and, if any one joined the party, it was brought about so quietly as to seem almost a matter of course.

Her failing appetite he managed as adroitly as he did her wonderful heart; every day some tempting little bit would find its way to her room—where, owing to her health, she took her meals—just at dinner-time. It was never much at a time, just enough, and served so attractively as to make her taste, and tasting was followed by a desire to eat the whole, and then she involuntarily found herself wishing he had sent a little more.

In this way she was not surfeited with anything, but a natural craving for food was gradually created, until she found herself able to eat quite a respectable meal.

One day they went, as they often did, to Truro Park.

Mr. Tressalia had found a cozy, retired rock, where they could sit, and talk, and read without fear of being disturbed, and see without being seen.

The day was delightful, and had tempted many people abroad, and the park was filled with gay visitors.

Editha, reclining on a soft shawl which Mr. Tressalia had spread over a moss-covered rock, was the picture of comfort as she listened to her companion's rich voice as he read from a new and interesting book, while her face involuntarily lighted as she caught the sound of merry laughter and children's happy voices in the distance.

She found herself wondering if she could be the same miserable creature that she had been three weeks before.

A feeling of peace was stealing over her, a sense of care and protection surrounded her, and she knew that health and strength were gradually returning to her.

Her heart was still wounded and sore—it could not be otherwise; but there was not quite the intolerable burden crushing her that there had been before the coming of her kind friend.

Mr. Tressalia closed his book at last, and a look of satisfaction stole into his eye as he marked her look of interest, and the faint tinge of color that for the first time he saw in her cheek.

He drew from his pocket a silver fruit-knife, and, reaching for a tiny basket that he had brought with him, but had kept tantalizingly covered all the time, he exposed to view two of the largest and most luscious peaches imaginable.

"Now, when you have eaten one of these as an appetizer, we will return for our dinner," he said, with a smile, as he deftly extracted the stone from the crimson and yellow fruit, and, placing the two halves on a large grape-leaf, laid it in her lap.

"It is too beautiful to eat," Editha said, viewing it with admiring eyes; but she disposed of it with evident relish, nevertheless.

The other was prepared in the same way, and ready for her as the last mouthful disappeared, but she demurred.

"You have not had your share," she said, smiling.

"You are my patient, remember, and I shall prescribe for you as I judge best; but if you feel very sensitive about it, I will share with you this time;" and, while he ate one-half, he watched the other disappear with intense satisfaction.

Editha could not fail to improve if her appetite could be coaxed back in this way.

They arose to return to their hotel, and, as they left their cozy retreat, they saw approaching them a lady leaning upon the arm of a gentleman.

They were both distinguished looking, and instantly attracted the attention of Editha and her attendant.

As they drew nearer, Mr. Tressalia started and uttered a low exclamation; the next instant he smiled, lifted his hat with a low bow, and, returning his salutation, they passed on.

Mr. Tressalia would have stopped and greeted them, but he knew how shy Editha was of strangers in her weak state, and he did not deem it best.

Editha, in her one passing glance, had instantly been attracted by the tall, queenly woman, who might perhaps have been about forty-two or three years of age.

Her face was fair, and sweet, and beautiful as a picture, and was surrounded by soft, waving chestnut hair.

Her eyes were large and blue, but rather mournful in expression, while there was a grieved droop about the full, handsome mouth.

Her companion was a middle-aged gentleman, though somewhat older than the lady, and, from their resemblance to each other, Editha judged them to be brother and sister.

"There goes a woman with a history, and a sad one, too," Mr. Tressalia remarked, when they were beyond hearing.

Editha sighed and wondered how many women there were in the world who had sad histories, but she only said:

"They are acquaintances of yours, then?"

"Yes; the lady is called Madam Sylvester, though I have been told that it is not her real name, being her maiden name, resumed after some unpleasantness connected with an unfortunate marriage. I met her in Paris two winters ago, and I think I never saw a more charming woman of her age in my life."

"She is certainly very pleasant to look at, though she shows that she has known sorrow of some kind," Editha said, thoughtfully.

"Would you like to know her history—at least as much of it as I am able to tell you? It is quite interesting."

"Yes, if you please."

"Report says that when quite young she fell in love with her own cousin and became engaged to him. This was a secret between them, since the lover was not in a position to marry. He went to sea to seek his fortune, as the story

goes, and not long after was reported lost. Miss Sylvester, to hide her grief, immediately plunged into all sorts of gayety and dissipation, and only a few months after her lover's death met a young American, who was instantly attracted by her great beauty. He soon made her an offer of marriage, and, after a very short courtship, they were married. A year later the former lover suddenly turned up—he was not lost, though had been nearly drowned, and afterward lay a long time in a fever. The young wife, in her joy at seeing him once more, thoughtlessly betrayed her love for him, which even then was not dead. The husband grew furious and unreasonably jealous, charged her with wilfully deceiving him, and a hot and angry scene followed. The next day the wife was missing—'she had fled,' those who knew anything of the circumstances said, 'with her early lover.' She returned almost immediately, however, humbled and repentant; but her husband denounced her, although she swore that she had committed no wrong. He returned to America; she hid herself broken-hearted for awhile, but finally sought her brother, whom she convinced of her chastity, since which time, having no other friends, they have seemed to live for each other. She would never consent to be called by her husband's name after that—though I never heard what that was—but took her maiden name. She is a wonderful woman, however; her life has been devoted to doing good; she is chastity itself, and is beloved by everybody who knows her, while her sympathy for the erring is boundless. That is an outline of her history, or as much as I know of it; but I believe there are some self-righteous people who shun her on account of what they term her 'early sin,' but the majority revere her, while I must confess to a feeling of great admiration for her."

"What became of the young lover with whom it was supposed she fled?" Editha asked, deeply interested in the sad tale.

"I do not know—I never heard. Madam never speaks of her past, and that is a mystery to the curious."

"I should like to know her," Editha said, feeling strangely drawn toward one who, like herself, had suffered so much.

"Would you? That is easily managed. I will ascertain where she is stopping, call upon her, and, as her heart is always touched for the sick, I know she will gladly come and see you," Mr. Tressalia said, eagerly, exceedingly pleased to have Editha manifest so much interest in his friend.

"Thank you. I should like it if she would; her history

is very sad, and her face attracts me strangely," she replied.

Three days afterwards they were in the Redwood Library, examining some of the valuable manuscripts on exhibition there, when Madam Sylvester and her brother entered.

Mr. Tressalia had tried to ascertain where they were stopping, but, to his great disappointment, he had failed to do so.

He now went forward at once to greet them, and they seemed very much pleased to renew their acquaintance with him.

After chatting a few moments, he brought Editha to madam and introduced her.

She studied the sweet face for a moment, then her faultlessly gloved hand closed over Editha's fingers in a strong yet tender clasp of sympathy and friendliness.

She had read in the pale, sorrow-lined face a grief kindred to what she, too, had suffered in the past.

"You are not well, my dear," she said, with a wistful look into the sad blue eyes, still keeping her hand closely clasped in hers.

"Miss Dalton has not been well, but we hope she is on the gain a little now. Have you seen the new piece of statuary that was brought in yesterday?" Mr. Tressalia asked, to draw her attention from Editha.

She was quite sensitive about having her illness remarked by strangers, and the color was now creeping with painful heat into her cheeks.

Madam took the hint at once, and turned to look at the new statue, and for a while kept up a spirited conversation with Mr. Tressalia about the objects of general interest in Newport.

But ever and anon her eyes sought the fair face bending with curious interest over the manuscripts with a look of pity and tenderness that told she was deeply interested in the frail-looking stranger.

"Who is she? Some one in whom you are *particularly* interested?" she asked, with the privilege of an old friend, as she drew Paul still farther away, ostensibly to look at some pictures.

He started, and his noble face was clouded with pain as he answered:

"Yes, I am particularly interested in her, but not in the way you mean, for her heart belongs to another."

"Ah! I thought from appearances that she belonged, or would some day, belong to you," returned madam, with a keen look into his handsome face.

"No," he said, gravely; "I am simply her friend. She has recently met with a great sorrow."

"I knew it," madam replied, with a soft glance at Editha, and a slight trembling of her lips. "Has the dear child a mother?"

"No; her mother died some years ago. She has no relatives living excepting her father, and he is not in sympathy with her."

"Ah! how I would like to comfort her. Come and see me this evening, and tell me more about her. I am strangely attracted toward her."

Paul Tressalia promised, and then they went back to Editha. Madam monopolized her, while he entertained her brother, and it was not long before the fair girl's heart was completely won by the beautiful and tender-hearted woman.

Madam Sylvester was remarkable for her tact and great versatility of talents, not the least of which was her charming manner in conversation.

She could be grave or gay, witty or learned, and fascinating in any role.

Paul Tressalia regarded her in surprise while she talked with Editha, drawing her from one subject to another, until she made her forget that there was such a person in the world as poor, heart-broken Editha Dalton.

She won the smiles back to her lips, drove the lines of care and trouble from her brow, and once, as she related some droll incident that had occurred on the steamer in which she came over, made her laugh aloud—the old-timed, clear, sweet laugh, that made Paul's heart thrill with delight.

"Miss Dalton, I am coming to see you. I am a dear lover of young people," she said, as they began to talk of going.

"Do; I shall be delighted," Editha said, with a sudden lighting of her sad eyes.

"I am a stranger here in Newport, never having been in this country before," madam continued. "I wish you and Mr. Tressalia would take pity upon me, and give me the benefit of your familiarity with the objects of interest here."

Editha unhesitatingly promised, not even suspecting that this request was made more for her own sake than for the beautiful stranger's; and then they all left the library together.

As they were about entering their carriage, Mr. Dalton drove by in his sporting sulky.

He bowed to Editha, and then bestowed a passing glance upon her new acquaintances.

That glance made him start and bestow a more search-

ing look upon Madam Sylvester; then he grew a sudden and deep crimson, while a look of great anxiety settled on his face.

He turned and looked back again after he had driven by.

"There can be but one face like that in the world. I must look into this," he muttered, uneasily.

"Who was that lady and gentleman with whom I saw you to-day at the Redwood Library?" he asked of Editha that evening.

"A Mrs. Sylvester and her brother," she replied.

"*Mrs. Sylvester!*" repeated Mr. Dalton, with a slight emphasis on the title.

"Mr. Tressalia introduced her as Madam Sylvester. Do you know anything about her?" she asked, looking up in surprise.

"Ah! Mr. Tressalia knows her, then? Where is she from?" he returned, thoughtfully, and not heeding her question.

"From Paris, France; they are French people, and extremely agreeable."

Mr. Dalton's face lost something of its habitual glow at this information, and he appeared ill at ease.

"Um! strangers, then, here. Does Tressalia know them intimately?" and he shot a searching, anxious glance at his daughter.

"Yes; he was telling me something of madam's history a day or two ago."

"What! have they been here any length of time?" interrupted Mr. Dalton, with a frown.

"Less than a week, I believe."

"Yes, yes; go on with what you were going to tell me," he again interrupted, impatiently.

"He said madam had seen a great deal of trouble—there was some misunderstanding between herself and husband, who, by the way, was an American, which resulted in their separation after they had been married only a year. But she appears like a very lovely woman to me," Editha replied, with a dreary look, as she remembered how she had been drawn toward the beautiful stranger.

Mr. Dalton watched her keenly out of the corners of his eyes; he was exceedingly moved and nervous about something; the corners of his mouth twitched convulsively, while he kept clasping and unclasping his hands in an excited way.

He paced the floor in silence for a few moments, then abruptly left the room.

Half an hour after he returned, and, while pretending to look over the newspaper, said:

"Editha, I've about concluded that I'd like a look at Saratoga; it is just the height of the season now; everything will be lovely, and Newport is getting a little tame."

"Tame, papa! Why, I thought there was no place like Newport to you!" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"I know; Newport is a sort of summer home to me, and, of course, there is no place like home; but, if you do not mind, I'd like a change for a little while"

"Cannot you go without me? I am very comfortable here," Editha asked, with a sigh.

She had no heart for gayety, and she was really happier just now there at Newport—notwithstanding her assertion to Mr. Tressalia that she did not enjoy Newport—than she had ever hoped to be again.

"No, indeed," he returned, quickly and decidedly. "I could not think of leaving you alone while you are so delicate; and besides, I cannot spare you, Editha—you and I are rather alone in this busy world."

She looked up in surprise at him at this unusual remark. It was a very rare occurrence for him to address her in such an affectionate manner.

It almost seemed to her, with the distrust she had lately had of him, that there was some sinister motive prompting this sudden change; but she stifled the feeling, and answered:

"Very well, I will go to Saratoga if you like. When do you wish to start?"

"To-morrow, if you can arrange it," Mr. Dalton replied, the cloud lifting from his face.

"Yes, I can arrange it;" but she sighed as she said it, for she was really beginning to wake up to a little life, and she dreaded any change.

She had been so calmly content since she had come to a definite understanding with Mr. Tressalia, and she wondered, with a feeling of sadness stealing over her, what she should do without her tireless friend.

She had grown to depend upon him for amusement; besides, he heard regularly from Earle, and though she did not dare acknowledge it even to her own heart, yet those letters from over the sea were the great events of the week to her.

She was sorry to go away without becoming more intimately acquainted with Madam Sylvester, for she had been strangely drawn toward her, thinking almost constantly of

her and her charming ways ever since her introduction to her. All during the evening she kept hoping that Mr. Tressalia would drop in, that she might tell him of the change in their plans, half wishing that he would join himself to their party and accompany them.

But he was spending the evening with Madam Sylvester, and meant to see Editha as early as possible the next morning.

But in this he was disappointed, for a gentleman friend sought him to give his advice upon the merits of a horse that he was contemplating buying, and before the bargain was completed Editha was gone, without even a word of good-by.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A CHANGE OF SCENE

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when at length Paul Tressalia knocked upon Editha's parlor door.

It was opened by the chambermaid, of whom he inquired for Miss Dalton.

"She is gone, sir," was the unexpected reply.

"Gone! Where?" he exclaimed, infinitely surprised.

"I don't know, sir; they left on the noon boat."

"Did they leave no word—no message for me?"

"Yes, sir; Miss Dalton left a note," the girl answered, producing it from the depths of her pocket.

Paul eagerly tore it open and devoured its contents:

"DEAR FRIEND:—Papa has suddenly decided that Newport is 'tame,' and longs for Saratoga. We are to leave on the twelve-o'clock boat, and do not know when we shall return. I shall not soon forget the days you have made so pleasant for me, nor the great good your cheerful society has done me. I would rather stay than go, but think it best to yield to papa's wishes. I hoped to see you before we left, but suppose you were engaged. Please give my kind remembrances to Madam Sylvestet. *Au revoir.* EDITHA."

"What in the name of Jupiter can have made him take this sudden start?" Paul Tressalia muttered, with a clouded brow, as with a terrible feeling of loneliness he sought his own rooms. "Can anything have transpired to upset his

equilibrium?" he continued. "It must have been a *very* sudden start, for I do not believe he contemplated any such thing yesterday morning."

He sat a long time thinking the matter over, and longing to follow them immediately.

He knew Editha would miss his care and attention, while as for him, it seemed as if the sun had suddenly been put out of existence.

Mr. Dalton had not treated him with his usual politeness this summer, and he was not sure but that he had done this purposely, in order to remove Editha from his society, and, if that was the case, he doubted the propriety of going after them.

These reflections were interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who brought him a card.

It proved to be that of Madam Sylvester, and he immediately went down to the reception-room, taking with him the note Editha had written.

"Why that brow of gloom, my friend? You look as if you had met with some sudden and great disappointment, madam said, playfully, after they had exchanged greetings.

"And so I have. I have just learned that Miss Dalton and her father have gone to Saratoga; and the suddenness of the movement disturbs and perplexes me exceedingly."

"Gone! Now *I* am dismayed, for I had come to call and be introduced to Papa Dalton, and ask him to spare his charming daughter to me for a few days. We are going to join a party to the White Mountains, and I thought if I could tempt Miss Dalton to accompany us, the change would do her good," madam said, with regret.

"It would have been beneficial to her, and it was very thoughtful in you to remember her," replied Mr. Tressalia, much pleased at this attention.

"Do not give me any credit for what is pure selfishness on my part," madam said, laughing. "I am over head and ears in love, as they say here, with your lovely little friend, and I wanted her under the shadow of my own wing for awhile to get better acquainted with her;" and the lady's face was very wistful, notwithstanding her playful speech.

"I cannot understand their sudden flight—for such it seems to me," returned Mr. Tressalia, moodily.

"Then you did not know anything of their intention?"

"Not a breath, until about half an hour ago, when I knocked at Miss Dalton's door, and the chambermaid gave me this note;" and he handed it to her.

"What a pretty hand she writes," said madam, smiling, as she noted the delicate chirography upon the perfumed envelope.

She read it through, growing grave as she marked the regret the note expressed at being obliged to go away.

Her eyes lighted with tenderness at the mention of herself, but she started as if in sudden pain, her fair face flushing a vivid crimson, as she read and involuntarily repeated the name signed at the bottom.

"Editha! Mr. Tressalia, you never told me what your friend's name is," and he thought her lips quivered slightly, as if at the remembrance of some sad incident of the past.

"No; I usually call her Miss Dalton when speaking of her to others. It is the dearest name in the world to me, he added, with a slight huskiness in his voice, "though I never utter it without pain."

"*Et tu,*" madam said, softly, noting the pain in his face, and knew all about it at once. "I thought you said——" she began again, and then suddenly stopped, as if she were trespassing upon forbidden ground.

"I know to what you refer," he replied. "I thought when you asked me if I was 'particularly interested' in her that you meant to infer an engagement between us, but—I may as well confess it—I have loved her hopelessly for two years."

Madam sighed heavily.

"Why is it that the world always goes wrong for some people?" he asked, passionately, and longing for sympathy now that he had begun to unburden his heart, and realizing, also that now Editha was gone, Newport was a blank to him, and fearing that his boasted "friendship" had not been so disinterested after all.

"Ah, why, unless to fit us for something better than earth's fleeting pleasures? There are some people in the world who would never own allegiance to the Great King, if they were not driven to Him by sorrow. It were better to suffer a few years here than to miss the bright Forever," madam, said, musingly, and as if talking with herself rather than to him. "But," she added, shaking off her dreaminess, "tell me more of this beautiful girl and your unfortunate regard for her—I am an old and privileged friend, you know, and the name 'Editha' has a charm for me which will only cease when I cease to live."

Paul Tressalia, glad to have so sweet a confidante, related all the story of his love for the fair girl, his disappointment on learning of her affection for Earle Wayne,

his hasty summons home to take possession of his supposed inheritance, which lost half its charm when he knew that Editha could not become its mistress and his wife.

He told her how he had been obliged to resign Wycliffe to Earle, who also hoped to make Miss Dalton mistress there, and who had returned so full of joy and hope to claim her as his own.

Then came the story of her strange abduction, her release from her captor's power by her lover, and then, when they believed their trials were all at an end, the dreadful blow came which had nearly broken both their hearts, and had seemed likely to wear Editha into her grave.

"What a sad, wonderful story it is. And you, I suppose, after the discovery which had ruined the life of your cousin, came thither to test your fate again?" madam said, her eyes beaming gentlest of sympathy upon the rejected lover.

"Yes; but I might have known better," he answered, bitterly, and with a sigh that was almost a sob heaving his broad chest. "I might have known that a love like hers, so pure, so strong, and noble, could never be won by another.

"Truly things do seem to go wrong sometimes in this world," madam said, sadly, and thinking of the poor sweet child who had passed through such deep water. Then, suddenly looking up at her companion with a keen glance, she continued: "You have suffered, my friend, deeply—you suffer now, even though you strive so nobly to overcome it; but—would you deem me very unsympathetic if I should tell you that I believe it will be better for you, after all, not to have married Editha Dalton, even though she could have given her wounded heart into your keeping?"

Paul Tressalia regarded her with astonishment.

"Why should you say that?" he asked.

"She is not exactly fitted for you—you might have passed a quiet, peaceful life together, but you could not have met all the wants of her nature, nor she of yours. You are maturer for your years than she is for hers, and beautiful, talented, lovable though she may be, there would have come a time in your lives when you both would have discovered there was something wanting to fill out the measure of your happiness."

"You speak like a prophetess," Paul Tressalia said, with a sad, skeptical smile.

"I have not lived my lonely life for naught," she answered, with a sigh. "I have studied human nature in all its phases, and, from what I know of you, I feel that the

woman whom you should marry should be quiet and self-contained like yourself, with a little touch of sorrow in her life to mate your own, and nearer your age."

"I shall never marry," he said, with a pale and suffering face, and yet wondering at his companion's strange words, while somehow his thoughts involuntarily took a swift flight, and he saw in the quiet parlor of a vine-clad gothic villa a gentle woman, with a sweet though sad face, which, next to Editha Dalton's, he had once told himself was the most beautiful his eyes had ever rested upon, while her voice, with its plaintive music, had vibrated upon his heart as the gentle summer breeze vibrates upon the strings of an æolian harp.

He had called it sympathy then. Would the mystic future, as it drew on apace, gradually efface this bitter pain from his heart, and he find beneath it a new name written there?

"You may think so now, but believe me, Paul, my friend, you will find her yet—this gentle, beautiful woman whom you should marry," madam said, in reply to his remark about not marrying.

"My dear madam," he returned, with a smile and a shake of his head, "you are but building castles in the air, which the lightest breath will dissipate. A man can never love but once as I have loved Editha Dalton."

"That may be true," madam smilingly assented; "but the first fierce, wild passion may not always be the wisest love. Wait a little, *mon ami*, and we shall see. You know—

'No one is so accursed by fate,
No one so utterly desolate,
But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto his own.'

But, meantime, I have a strange, irrepressible longing to see more of this motherless girl, whose life has been so sadly blighted at the outset. Mr. Tressalia, I think *I* would like to see a little of Saratoga myself, and I feel confident that Miss Editha would not feel sorry to see her friend again."

"Do you think so?" he asked, eagerly.

"I am sure of it. This little note breathes of a strong regret that she was obliged to go away at all. I am afraid she will wilt again if she cannot be under genial influences."

Madam's face was full of a strange, wistful tenderness as she spoke, and Paul Tressalia wondered why she should

feel so strangely drawn toward Editha. It was a matter of wonder to all.

"Does that mean that you think we had better follow Mr. Dalton and his daughter to Saratoga?" he asked.

"Yes; but first I must go to the White Mountains, since I proposed the trip, and others would be disappointed if it was given up. I must postpone my trip to Saratoga until my return," returned madam, with a look which plainly said she wished she had not planned the trip to the mountains at all.

"I wonder——" Paul began, and then stopped.

"Well? And so do I," laughed his companion, after waiting a moment and he did not go on.

"I was pondering the question whether it is best for me to go to Saratoga at all," he said, gravely.

"And why not?"

"If Editha is really on the gain, it would perhaps be better for me to return at once to England and not see her again."

"Does it hurt you so, my friend?" asked madam, pityingly. "You must conquer that, if possible, though I myself know how hard a thing that is to do, and it seems cold advice to give. But it would give me pleasure if you would accompany us to Saratoga. We know nothing about the ins and outs of the place, and it would really be a comfort to have a pilot."

"Then that settles the matter. I will go with you," he said.

"Not if it is to interfere with any necessary business," madam said, hastily, yet decidedly.

"It will not. I have no business—I have no aim in life now," he added, bitterly.

"Come with us to the mountains," Madam Sylvester said, with a sudden thought. "You need a little judicious comforting as well as Miss Dalton, and I believe I am just the one to take you in hand. Will you come?"

"Yes, thanks; I cannot resist. I believe you charm every one with whom you come in contact," he answered, laughing, and glad to be invited.

"That is pleasant to hear. We will make our trip as short as possible, and then fly to the far-famed springs of Saratoga, to drink of their mystic waters."

And so it was arranged, and Paul Tressalia was drawn irresistibly to do this woman's bidding, yet wondering at himself for doing it, and more and more surprised to see how Editha had fascinated her.

But he could not know how rapidly an invisible hand was turning the pages of life, and that he was soon to read a strange story in that mystic book of fate, which Heaven so seldom deigns to open to mortal eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AT SARATOGA

MADAM SYLVESTER went to the White Mountains with her party, as she had planned to do, while Mr. Dalton, congratulating himself upon the success of his maneuver—the reason for which he supposed no one but himself knew anything about—was enjoying the brilliant society at Saratoga to the full.

"I flatter myself that I have played my little game very nicely," he said many times to himself, when thinking of their hasty flitting from Newport; and those soft white hands of his were rubbed together in the most approving manner, accompanied by a most approving chuckle.

He insisted now that Editha was well enough to join in the gayeties of the place and accompany him to the different places of amusement and pleasure.

She would have preferred the solitude of her own room or to be allowed to roam quietly by herself in the different parks during the morning, when there were few abroad; but he persisted, and, thinking it could not matter much what she did, she yielded for the sake of peace, although she did not really feel able to bear the excitement as yet.

The result was highly gratifying to Mr. Dalton, for Editha at once became a star of no small magnitude. Her delicate, almost ethereal beauty instantly attracted a crowd of admirers. She was "new," and after an entirely different pattern from most of the fashionable belles who frequented the place, which, together with the fact of her being an heiress, was considered sufficient cause for any amount of admiration and homage being paid her. And so she was whirled into the vortex of fashionable life. The days were turned into night, night into day, and all the quiet which she had so enjoyed at Newport into an endless round of excitement.

One evening there was to be a garden-party—"the most brilliant affair of the season," according to the flaming announcement.

Editha did not want to go.

"I am tired out now, papa, besides having no heart for anything of the kind," she said, wearily, when Mr. Dalton began to talk of the details of her dress, about which he was very particular for a man.

"Pshaw!" he returned, impatiently; "you have been moping yourself to death, and need waking up. This is to be the finest occasion of the season, I am told, and I shall take no pleasure in it unless I can have you with me."

It was not Editha that he particularly wanted for the sake of the pleasure he would take in her society, but a handsomely dressed lady by his side, to be admired, and to help him pass the time agreeably.

Of course Editha yielded rather than to have any words about it, and gave her attention, with what interest she could command, to the wearisome business of preparation.

When the night arrived, and she appeared before her father in the finest of black Brussels net, embroidered in rich golden-hearted daisies, and gracefully looped over rose-colored silk, from which here and there flashed superb ornaments of diamonds, and above which her delicate face rose like some pure, clear-cut cameo, Mr. Dalton was for a moment speechless with admiration, and Editha really felt paid for the effort she had made.

"Editha," exclaimed her father, when he at last found his voice, "there will be no one so beautiful as yourself in the park to-night. I shall have the honor of escorting the fairest woman in Saratoga."

"Thank you, papa. I never heard you compliment any one like that before," laughed Editha, surprised at his enthusiasm, and never realizing how exceedingly lovely she was.

"I never had occasion, I can assure you," he answered, as his eyes lingered proudly upon her graceful form.

Editha was not one of those variable young ladies who adopt every new fashion for dressing the hair, whether it is becoming or not.

Her hair to-night, as always, was worn in plaited bands of satin smoothness, and coiled around her shapely head, its only ornament a small cluster of daisies fastened on one side with a diamond aigrette.

Tiny daisies, in the center of whose golden heart there glittered a diamond like a drop of dew, hung in her ears, while on her arms of Parian whiteness were bracelets to match.

It would indeed be impossible to imagine a fairer vision

or a more unique and attractive costume among the hundreds that would assemble that evening.

The weather was perfect, and the decorations of the park were very elaborate and elegant. Flags hung gracefully canopied over the entrance like curtains, and festooned along the fanciful frame-work.

Light frames of stars, triangles, hearts, shields, and many other devices, were fastened everywhere among the trees to support the transparent lanterns of almost magical beauty. The electric light flooded the whole scene with almost the brightness of day, and made the place seem as if touched by the wand of an enchanter.

The finest dressing of the season graced this party, and, as some one has said, "it did not require a great stretch of the imagination to convert the passing throng into elves and fairies, their raiment appearing to have been woven with the gossamer threads of the cobwebs, and out of the butterflies' wings, as if the dew of the morning, the mist of the moon, the dew-drops gathered from the calyx of the lily, had all been collected and laid with homage at the feet of the ethereal creatures who lead captive the sons of men."

And that the fairest of them all was Editha Dalton seemed to be generally admitted by both old and young.

Strangers, catching sight of that fair face rising above the golden-hearted daisies, pointed her out, and asked who she was. Friends and acquaintances crowded around to catch a word, a smile, a look even, and wondering why they had never before realized how exquisitely lovely she was.

Something of the beauty and excitement of the occasion seemed to animate her. Her burden of sorrow for the time seemed to drop from her heart, and she appeared to become a part of the brightness which surrounded her, while she danced, chatted, and laughed much like the free-hearted, blithesome Editha of old.

Many remarked it afterward, and declared that she must have been a fairy, or elf, who, since they never saw her again, must have floated away at some magic hour of the night at the stern decree of some uncanny ogre. Nor were they far out of the way in their surmises.

The small hours were approaching, and the merriment was at its height. Editha had been dancing with a friend of Mr. Dalton's, and seemed to enjoy it, as much as any one. She evidently liked her companion, for she made herself very agreeable to him, while he more than once, by

his wit and sparkling repartee, had called the familiar silvery laughter from her beautiful lips.

When the dance was through he led her to a quiet place to rest. He did not leave her, but remained standing by her side, watching her expressive face, as she in turn watched the passing throng, forgetful for the time of all save the life and joy of the occasion.

Suddenly he saw her start. A flush leaped into her cheeks, a brighter light to her eyes, as she arose and extended both hands to a gentleman who was approaching.

"Mr. Tressalia! How glad I am! When did you arrive, and how did you find me?" she asked, all in a breath.

"Thank you. I arrived on the late evening train, and I found you by the power of intuition, I think," he answered, laughing, as he glanced from her to her companion, and heartily shook both hands.

Editha introduced the two gentlemen, and, after a few moments' conversation, her former companion excused himself and went away with a clouded brow, muttering something about the unexpected appearance of old lovers.

Editha was really delighted to see her friend. She had missed him sadly, and she was chatting away with him in the most social manner, asking all sorts of questions about Newport and her friends, when Mr. Dalton all at once came upon the scene.

He expressed no surprise at seeing Mr. Tressalia, but the frown upon his brow testified to his displeasure, although he politely inquired regarding his arrival.

"I came on with some old friends who were anxious to visit the place—Madam Sylvester and her brother," he answered.

Mr. Dalton started violently, and flushed hotly at this information, and appeared all at once so nervous and strangely excited that Mr. Tressalia regarded him with surprise.

"Madam Sylvester!" exclaimed Editha, joyously, and not noticing her father's agitation. "I am so glad. I liked her so much at Newport. I shall be glad to extend our acquaintance."

"Your pleasure is reciprocated, I can assure you, for madam was equally delighted with you," Paul returned, with his eyes still on Mr. Dalton.

He had withdrawn a trifle within the shadow of a tree, and stood with his head bent, looking down upon the ground, his face dark with anger, while he worked his hands in a nervous way and gnawed his under lip.

"What in thunder ails the man, to make him look and act so strangely?" the young man asked, within himself.

"Are madam and her brother here at the garden-party?" Editha asked.

"Yes; the fame of it reached us before we arrived, and you know the electric light is visible for several miles before we reach Saratoga; so, notwithstanding our weariness, we all thought we must come and take a look at the enchanted place."

"It is lovely, isn't it?" she asked, her eyes roving in every direction over the bright scene.

"Yes, indeed; I never saw anything like it before. Madam and her brother went to the dancing pavilion to see if they could find you, but I thought I should discover you in some quiet nook, as I have."

Editha laughed, and the beautiful color rushed half guiltily to her cheeks.

"You would not have thought so if you had come fifteen minutes earlier. I think the music has bewildered me to-night for I have been dancing with the merriest. But how does it happen that you are a visitor at Saratoga?" she asked, to change the subject.

"Oh, after receiving your note telling me of your destination, Newport lost its charms, and I felt in immediate need of medicinal spring water," he said, in a playful strain, delighted to find her so improved and animated. "Madam Sylvester was affected in the same way," he added. "I expect that remarkable woman will be tempted to kidnap you and bear you away to regions unknown before long, she has taken such a fancy to you."

"Just hear that, papa—fancy any one taking such a liking to me that they would want to kidnap me. Why, what is the matter? Are you ill?" Editha cried, as she turned toward her father, and was transfixed by one glance into his face.

It was white as alabaster, and his eyes glowed like two coals of fire with some violent inward emotion.

"No, no; not ill, but very tired. I think we ought to return at once to our hotel, Editha," he answered, with an evident effort to regain his composure.

"I am sorry if you are tired, papa; I thought you were enjoying yourself immensely. Sit down and rest in some quiet place, please. I really do not like to return just yet."

"But you are not strong; I fear the dampness will do you injury," Mr. Dalton said, anxious to get her away at

once, and never having given a thought to the dampness until that moment.

"I am very warm and comfortable; indeed I thought the air remarkably clear and dry to-night," Editha said, without moving.

"Really, Editha, I think I must insist——"

"Please don't insist upon anything, papa," returned the girl, wilfully; "if you are so weary, go *you* back to the Grand Union, and Mr. Tressalia will bring me by and by."

She was determined that she would not be walked off thus summarily like a little girl in petticoats, and Mr. Dalton had to beat a retreat.

"I think I will go for a smoke, then," he said, as he turned and walked abruptly away.

Paul Tressalia wondered what it all meant.

The man had betrayed his great agitation only upon the mention of Madam Sylvester's name.

Did he know her, and if so was there enmity between them? Was that the reason of his sudden flight from Newport?

His manner was certainly very strange, and he had evidently intended to get Editha away before any meeting occurred between her and madam, but he could not very well urge the matter any further without betraying himself, and so he had walked away in no enviable frame of mind.

Editha watched him curiously until he passed from sight, then turning to her companion, she said:

"I do not believe papa is feeling very well; perhaps I ought to have gone."

"Shall I take you to him?" Paul asked, considerably.

"Not just yet. I would like to see Madam Sylvester a moment, if we can find her; but first tell me"—and the beautiful face instantly lost all its lovely color—"have you heard again from—from—Earle?"

"Yes; I had a letter day before yesterday, and he is not very well, he writes; the doctor does not think the climate exactly agrees with him," Mr. Tressalia answered, his own face growing grave as he saw the brightness die out of hers.

Editha sighed, and the old grieved look returned to her lips.

"Would you like to read his letter? I have it with me," he asked, considerably.

"No, no; I could not do that. Tell me, please, what you like about him; but I cannot quite bear to read his own words just yet," she said, with unutterable sadness.

"My poor little friend, your lot is a hard one," he said, softly.

"Don't pity me, please—life is hard enough for us all, I think," she returned, quickly and bitterly.

"Earle thinks he will have to have a change as soon as he can get away," Mr. Tressalia continued, "and asks if I will resume the charge of Wycliffe for him. Shall I tell you all that he says about it?"

"Yes, yes; go on," the poor girl said, eagerly, though every word was fresh torture to her.

"He says he cannot live longer away from you, Editha; it is killing him, and he *must* come where he can see you once in awhile. He writes, 'Ask her if I may. I will say nothing that shall wound her. I will be firm and strong; but, oh! I am so homesick for a look into her eyes, for a clasp of her hand. Ask her, Paul, if I may come.'"

"No, no, no!" burst in a low, frightened tone from the girl's lips. "He must not come. Write to him instantly and tell him so. Mr. Tressalia, I could not bear that of all things in the world. I will not see him. He must not come. I will hide from him. Oh! why must I suffer so?"

The words ended in a low, heart-broken sob. She had clasped both hands convulsively around her companion's arm in her excitement, and was now shivering and trembling so that he was greatly alarmed.

The brightness and exceeding beauty that had been hers when he first saw her had only been the result of a momentary excitement after all.

He had flattered himself that she was really better and stronger, both in body and spirit, but now he saw that her poor heart was just as sore and wounded as ever, and that her fatal love was still eating at her vitals.

Earle, he knew from the letter he had so lately received, was suffering in the same way, and what these poor tried ones were to do all their future was a sore trouble to him.

"Be calm, dear child," he said, in low, quiet tones. "Earle shall do just as you wish. Come and walk with me until your nerves are a little more steady."

He unclasped those locked fingers from his arm, and drawing one hand within it, led her away into a retired path, and talked gravely of other things, until he saw the wild look fade from her eyes, the hand on his arm grow quiet, and knew that her intense excitement was gradually subsiding.

But it hurt him deeply to hear every few minutes a deep, shuddering, sobbing sigh come from her pale lips—some-

thing as a child breathes after it has exhausted itself with weeping and fallen asleep.

He would gladly have restored happiness both to Earle and her if he could have done so, even to the sacrificing of his own life, but he could not—each must bear his own burden. It seemed as if they had been beset on every hand with troubles during the past few years, fulfilling those words of Shakespeare's:

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions."

"Earle has had an adventure. Shall I tell you about it?" he asked, when at length she had apparently grown quite calm, and intuitively knowing that she would like to hear more.

"If you please."

"There has been an attempt made to rob Wycliffe, and but for his calmness and bravery great mischief would have been done."

"Ah! he was always brave; but—but I hope he was not injured," Editha cried, a feeling of faintness stealing over her.

"Bless you, no; else he would not now be talking of a change. He not only prevented a robbery and protected himself, but he has captured the robber."

"I am sure that is good news," she said, now deeply interested.

"And, Editha, who do you suppose the robber proved to be?"

"I am sure I cannot imagine; and yet you—you cannot mean——"

"Yes, I do mean it," he answered, reading her thought. "It was no other than that wretch who robbed your father's house several years ago, and for whom Earle suffered the penalty. I was *Tom Drake*, that man whom you met after your visit to John Loker's, and who afterwards entered your house the second time and compelled you by his mesmeric power to go away with him."

Editha shuddered, and yet she could hardly believe her ears. She had always been afraid of meeting that dreadful man again, and now to know that he was away in England and a captive, was a great relief to her.

"It does not seem possible," she said.

"It is righteous judgment that he should at last be taken by the very one who unjustly served out the sentence that

ought to have been pronounced upon him threefold," was the stern reply.

"Tell me how it happened, please—that is, if you know?"

"Yes; Earle wrote me a good deal about it. It seems that the fellow did not deem the United States a safe place for him after John Loker's confession was made public—the description of himself was too accurate for that—so he fled to England, and has undoubtedly been carrying on his nefarious operations there ever since. About a month after I left Wycliffe, Earle was awakened one night by the sound as of some one stepping cautiously around in his dressing-room. His revolver was in reach, and he instantly secured it. The next moment a man passed into his room. It was not a very dark night, and as the robber glided between the bed and the window his figure was clearly outlined, and Earle, aiming low, fired at him. He fell with a groan. It was but the work of a minute to strike a light and go to the prostrate man, who was too badly wounded to make any resistance, and he found that his fallen foe was none other than his and your enemy Tom Drake.

"What a strange adventure; and—Earle was in great danger," Editha whispered, with a deep-drawn breath.

"Yes; but the strangest of all is yet to come," pursued Mr. Tressalia. "Instead of giving the wretch up to the authorities, as any one else would have done in spite of his fearful sufferings, he enjoined strictest silence upon the servants, called in the old family physician and swore him to secrecy, and is now nursing the wretch back to health as tenderly as if he was his own brother."

"This is just like Earle's nobility—he is 'a noble of nature's own creating!'" said Editha, admiringly; and her face glowed with pride for this grand act of one whom she so fondly loved.

"Was the man very severely injured?" she asked, after a moment of silence.

"Yes, in the thigh; he will probably be a cripple for life, Earle says."

"How sad! What will be done with him when he recovers?"

"Earle did not write what his intentions were, but he will probably be transported for life, where, with a ball and chain attached to him, you will never need fear him any more

"Poor fellow! The English laws are more severe than our own, then," she said, with a sigh.

"If the laws of the United States were more stringent, and the penalties for extreme cases more severe, your prisons

would not be so full, and, in my opinion, there would be less mischief done," Mr. Tressalia replied, thoughtfully.

At this moment some one spoke his name, and, turning, they saw Madam Sylvester and her brother approaching.

Pleasant greetings were exchanged, and then they all sought seats at a little distance near a fountain for a few moments' conversation before returning to their hotel.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES

WHEN Mr. Dalton turned so abruptly and left Mr. Tressalia and Editha he was indeed terribly excited.

He walked rapidly to a remote portion of the park, where, out of the sight and sound of every one, he paced back and forth under the trees, muttering fierce imprecations upon some one, and gesticulating in a wild and angry manner.

"I must get away from here at once," he muttered. "Whatever could have possessed *them* to follow us here? Of course *she* cannot *know* anything, and what especial interest can she have in my daughter? But I'm terribly afraid some unlucky remark or question will expose all—Editha is so *charmingly ingenuous*," he went on, with sarcastic bitterness; "and I have lost enough already—I will not be balked at this late day. I have fought fate all my life, and now I'll conquer or die. We will get out of this place instantly; and since they are French, they will not mind, perhaps, if we take 'French leave.'"

A half-hour or more Mr. Dalton spent by himself giving vent to his anger and vexation, and then, in a somewhat calmer frame of mind, he went to seek Editha to return to their hotel. He was obliged to search some time, for the throng was immense, and it was no easy matter to discover a person once lost sight of.

But he found them at length all together, Madam Sylvester and her brother, Mr. Tressalia and Editha, standing by one of the fountains, as if they had just arisen from their seats and were contemplating retiring from the place.

Madam was standing by Editha, her arm lightly clasping her waist, and talking in her gentle, charming way, while the young girl's eyes were fixed upon her face in a look of earnest admiration.

"A very touching scene," sneered Mr. Dalton, as he came

in sight of them. "A clear case of mutual affinity that is remarkable under the circumstances. My daughter seems to possess a power of attraction *in certain directions* that is truly wonderful."

He stood looking at the group for a few moments with a dark frown upon his brow, and as if undecided whether it was best to advance or retreat.

He seemed at length to decide upon the latter course, for he turned, and was about slipping away, when Editha espied him, and called out:

"There he is now. Papa, come here, please;" and she went toward him, drawing Madam Sylvester with her. "I want to introduce you to my friend, Madam Sylvester," she said, with a sweet smile, and all unsuspecting of the tempest raging within Mr. Dalton's bosom.

It was done, and there was no escape now; but it was a very pale face that Sumner Dalton bent before madam and the steel-like glitter of his eyes repelled her, and made her think of Editha as a poor lamb in the clutches of a wolf.

"She does not look like him; she must resemble her mother; but she has hair and eyes like——" was madam's inward comment, but which was broken short off at this point with a regretful sigh.

But the next moment she had turned to him again with her usual graciousness.

"Mr. Dalton," she said, "I have been telling your daughter how disappointed I was to find her gone so suddenly from Newport. I had only just become acquainted with her, to be sure, but I had promised myself much pleasure in my intercourse with her."

Mr. Dalton bowed and smiled, and mechanically repeated something stereotyped about "mutual pleasure," &c., and then turned to be presented to Mr. Gustave Sylvester, but not before madam had noticed again that steel-like glitter in his eyes.

"My dear," she said to Editha, "I have not yet asked you where you are stopping?"

"At the Grand Union."

"That is capital, for we have all secured rooms there also, and I hope we shall see much of each other."

"I hope so, too," Editha said, heartily, and thinking how all her life she had longed for just such a friend as she thought madam would be.

"How long do you remain?" she asked.

"I am sure I cannot tell. As long as papa desires, I suppose, as I make my plans conform to his as much as possible," and Editha cast an anxious glance at Mr. Dalton, whose strange manner she had remarked; and was somewhat troubled by it. He was sustaining rather a forced conversation with Mr. Gustave Sylvester, but his manner was nervous and his brow gloomy and lowering.

"You are looking better than when I saw you at Newport," madam said, with an admiring glance at her beautiful companion.

"Yes, I think my health is improving," Editha answered; but she sighed as she said it, and a look of pain crossed her face.

Speaking of her ill-health always reminded her of its cause, and sent her thoughts flying over the sea to Earle.

The sigh touched madam, for she divined its cause; and, drawing the fair girl a little closer within her encircling arm, she laid her lips against her ear and tenderly whispered:

"We must never forget, dear, no matter how dark our lot, that One has said, 'Thy strength is sufficient for thee.'"

Editha started, and her lip quivered a trifle.

"Do you think it is possible to realize that under all circumstances?" she asked, a slight tremulousness in her tone, notwithstanding her effort at self-control.

Madam drew her gently one side, and began walking slowly around the fountain, in order to be beyond the hearing of the others.

"In the first moments of our blind, unreasoning grief, perhaps not," she answered, with grave sweetness. "I have known, dear child, what it is—

To wander on without a ray of hope,

To find no respite even in our sleep,

Life's sun extinguished, in the dark to grope,

And hopeless through the weary world to creep.'

That is the way life seemed to me once, but in time I came to realize that in this world of weary toil and waiting there must be some burden-bearers, and God meant me to be one of them."

"But all burdens are not heavy alike," murmured Editha.

"No, dear; but if 'Our Father' sends them, we may be very sure that it is right for us to bear them; and Frances Anne Kemble tells us:

'A sacred burden is this life ye bear,
Look on it—lift it, bear it patiently,
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly,
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win.'

"Those are brave, cheering words. If I could but have some kind comforter like you all the time, I could bear it better," Editha said, with fast-dropping tears, and realizing more than she had ever done before how utterly alone she was in the world.

"My dear, you forget the great Divine Comforter. Haven't you yet learned to trust Him?" madam asked, with great tenderness.

"You—oh, yes; at least I *thought* I had until this last trouble came upon me, which has made it seem almost as if 'a blank despair like the shadow of a starless night was thrown over the world in which I moved alone.' Many and many a time I have felt as if I must lie down like a weary child and weep out the life of sorrow which I have borne, and which I still must bear until the end," the young girl said, with almost passionate earnestness.

"My poor child, how my heart grieves for you. Mr. Tressalia has told me something of your trouble, and I think I never knew of anything quite so sad before; but, believe me, some good must come out of it. You are young, and this sad lesson patiently learned will give you strength of character for the future, whatever it may be. You know we are told that out of sorrow we come forth purified if we bear it rightly.

"Then I fear I shall never become purified," Editha answered, bitterly. I *cannot* bear it rightly. I am not patient. My heart is constantly rebelling against the unjustness, as it seems to me, of it all. Why did not some instinct warn me that Earle was my brother before I had learned to love him so well?" she concluded, wildly.

"Hush, dear," madam said, with gentle reproof, but her fine face was very grave and troubled. "We cannot understand the *why* of a great many things; we know that they *are*, and we have no right to question the wisdom of anything that is beyond our comprehension; but I am greatly interested in this sorrow of yours and the young Marquis of Wycliffe. I know it will do you good to unburden your heart, and if you can trust me who am almost a stranger to you, tell me more about it."

"You do not seem like a stranger to me. You are more

like a dear, long-trying friend, and I can never tell you how comforting your kind sympathy is to me," Editha returned, with eyes full of tears.

Madam's only reply was a closer clasp around the slender waist, and the young girl continued:

"When we met you that day in Redwood Library at Newport, and your hand closed over mine with such a strong yet fond clasp, and you looked into my eyes in that earnest, tender way you have, I could have wound my arms about your neck and wept out my grief upon your bosom even then."

Madam's eyes were full of tears now, but Editha did not see them, and went on:

"I will gladly tell you all about my sad trouble, only I would not like to weary you."

"It will not weary me, dear."

And so Editha, won more and more by this beautiful woman's sweetness and gentleness, poured into her sympathizing ear all her story, beginning with the time Earle had come a poor boy into her uncle's employ, and ending with their final separation when they were told that they were both children of one father.

"It is a very strange, sad history," madam said, when she had finished; "but the facts of the case are so very evident that there can be no way of disputing them; and this uncle of yours, what a noble man he was."

"Yes; he was mamma's brother, and a dear, dear uncle. Oh! if he could but have lived," Editha sighed.

"My dear, he could not have prevented this."

"No; but he would have comforted me as no other could have done."

"You were every fond of him, then?"

"Yes; I believe I loved him better than any one in the world. That does not seem just right to say, perhaps, when papa and mamma were living, but he was always so sympathizing and tender with me. He would always listen patiently and with interest to all my little trials, and sympathize with me when everybody else laughed at them as trifles."

"Had he no family of his own?"

"No; he was what we call an old bachelor," Editha replied, with a little smile; "and he was the dearest old bachelor that ever lived. I used to think sometimes that he must have loved some one long ago, for there were times when he was very sad. But he never seemed to like the ladies very well; he would never go into company if he could help it, and, whenever I said anything to him about it, he

used to tell me, in a laughing way, that he was waiting to be my escort, so as to frighten away all unworthy suitors."

"He did not like the society of ladies, you say?"

"No; he was always coldly polite to them, but would never show them any attention."

"He liked *one* well enough, it seems, to leave her all his fortune," madam said, with an arch look into the beautiful face at her side.

"Yes; he gave me all he had, excepting the ten thousand that Earle was to have. I was always his 'pet,' his 'ray of sunshine,' his 'happiness,' but I would rather have my dear, kind uncle back than all the fortunes in the world," she said sadly.

"He was your mother's brother, you say, dear—what was his name?" asked madam, who had been very deeply interested in all she had heard.

"It is a name that he was always very proud of—*Ri—*"

"Editha!" suddenly called Mr. Dalton from behind them. "I have been chasing you around for the last half-hour. Do you know what time it is?"

"No, papa."

"It is after one, and time that delicate people were at rest."

"Very well; I am ready to go now, if you wish," she said, quietly.

Mr. Tressalia and Mr. Sylvester now joined them, and the former made some proposal to madam regarding an excursion for the morrow.

While they were discussing the question Mr. Dalton tried to hurry Editha away, regardless of the propriety of the thing.

"I must bid them good-night, papa," she said, coldly, and wilfully standing her ground, while she wondered at his extreme haste.

"Be quick about it, then, for I am dused tired," he said, impatiently.

She then said good-night to them in a general way, and turned to accompany her father, not very well pleased to be treated so like a child.

"My dear," called madam, with an anxious look in her eye, as she saw how pale and weary Editha was looking, "get all the rest you can, and then come to me as soon as you have breakfasted to-morrow, for I have something very particular to say to you. My room is No. 105.

Editha promised, while Sumner Dalton ground his teeth with inward rage at this familiar request.

"What you can see in *her* to admire is more than I can imagine," he remarked, curtly, on their way out of the park.

"Why, papa, where are your eyes? I think she is the most charming woman I ever met," Editha replied, with unwise enthusiasm.

"I prefer you should not be quite so free with an entire stranger—it is not proper," he growled.

She set her little chin, and her eyes flashed with a light which told that she considered herself old enough and capable of judging for herself upon such matters.

"Have you enjoyed the evening?" she asked, avoiding any reply to his remark.

"Well enough until *they* came," was the curt retort.

"I am sorry if you do not like my new friends, papa, but I thought you used to admire Mr. Tressalia," Editha returned, a little spirit of mischief prompting the last half of her remark.

"He is well enough, only, according to my way of looking at things, it does not seem just the thing for him to be hanging around you all the time and running after you as if you belonged to him," Mr. Dalton said, crossly.

He was evidently entirely out of sorts, and Editha knew it would be better to let the matter drop, but she could not resist one more little shaft.

"I thought you liked me to receive Mr. Tressalia's attentions," she said, innocently.

"So I did once, but circumstances alter cases sometimes; and—we will not discuss Mr. Tressalia further, if you please."

He was undeniably cross, and she was glad to escape to her room as soon as they reached the hotel, while she was inwardly rejoicing at the prospect of having Madam Sylvester's companionship for awhile at least.

Madam stood and watched her as she left them and moved away with her father.

Her face was very sad and her voice trembled slightly as, turning to her brother, she asked:

"Of whom does she remind you, Gustave?"

"Of no one in particular," he returned, indifferently.

"Not of——" and she bent forward and whispered the rest of the sentence in his ear.

"No, not if my memory serves me right," he said, shaking his head; "and yet," he added, "there *may* be an expression about the eyes that is familiar. I had not thought of it before."

"Gustave, her name is Editha," madam said, in a low

voice, her face very pale, and with an eager look into her brother's face.

"There are doubtless a thousand Edithas in the world; do not allow yourself to become imaginative at this late day, Estelle," he returned; and, dropping the matter there, madam signified her readiness to return to the hotel also.

CHAPTER XL

ADIEU TO SARATOGA

EDITHA had told her maid that she need not sit up for her, as it would doubtless be very late when she returned from the park; but she almost regretted that she had done so, for, on reaching her room, and with the false strength which excitement gives gone, she found herself very weak and weary.

She sank listlessly into a chair and began removing her ornaments, and while thus engaged there came a knock upon her door.

Almost simultaneously it was opened, for she had not locked it, and Mr. Dalton thrust in his head.

"Where is Annie?" he asked.

"In bed, papa. I told her she need not wait for me. Do you want anything very particularly?"

"I want to see you," he replied, coming in and shutting the door. "I am sorry it is so late. I wish we had come home earlier. I have had bad news. I have important business that calls me home immediately," he concluded, speaking disconnectedly and excitedly.

"Home?" exclaimed Editha, greatly surprised, and feeling deeply disappointed, for, of course, she knew he would expect her to go with him. Besides, she could not bear the thought of leaving so soon after Madam Sylvester's arrival.

"Yes; we must start by six to-morrow morning. Can you be ready?"

"So soon?" she said, with a weary sigh.

"Yes; I must go immediately. If there was a train in an hour, and we could get ready, I would take it," he answered, excitedly.

"Why, papa, what can possibly have happened to recall you so suddenly?"

"You would not understand if I should tell you," he said, uneasily; "it is private business of my own. Will you be ready?"

"It is very little time," Editha replied, wearily. "Would it not do to wait a day or two longer?"

"No, not an hour longer than it will take to pack our trunks and catch a train," Mr. Dalton said, with a frown.

He was beginning to be very angry to be thus opposed.

"I *wish* this had not happened just now, and *they* have only arrived to-night," Editha murmured, reflectively.

Mr. Dalton scowled angrily, and muttered something about the selfishness of women generally.

Editha sat thinking for a few moments, and then asked:

"Could you not go home without me, papa, if this business is so very urgent? I would really like to remain at the Springs a little longer, and I know that Madam Sylvester would gladly act as my chaperon until you can return."

It was all that Mr. Dalton could do to suppress an oth at this request.

"No, no," he said, quickly. "I am nearly sick with all this worry and fuss, and I cannot spare you."

He did indeed look worried over something, and his face was pale, his eyes very bright and restless; but Editha could not think it necessary that she should be hurried off in such an unheard-of manner, just for a matter of business.

"If you must go, and think you cannot get along without me, suppose you go on an early train, and I will follow with Annie later?" she said. "A few hours cannot make much difference to you, and I really think it would be uncivil to hurry away so, and without even a word of farewell to our friends. Besides, I promised I would see Madam Sylvester in the morning.

"I should think you were fairly bewitched with this French madam. I will not have it. You must return with me; and, if report speaks the truth, your wonderful friend is no fit companion for *my* daughter," Mr Dalton cried, with angry hauteur.

"Then you knew her before to-night. I thought so from your manner. *What* do you know about her?" Editha asked, greatly surprised.

"I cannot say that I had that honor," her father returned, sarcastically. "I never spoke with her until to-night, and I cannot say that I wish to extend the acquaintance."

"She is a very lovely, as well as a good, pure woman," Editha asserted, with flushing cheeks, and indignant with him for speaking so slightly of her new friend. "Mr.

Tressalia," she added, "knows all about her, and he says that, excepting for a mistake or two during the early part of her life, her character is above suspicion."

"A mistake or two in one's early life, as you express it, often ruins one for all time," remarked Mr. Dalton, dryly.

Having proved the truth of that axiom to a certain extent, he knew whereof he spoke.

"Then you would not be willing for me to remain with her under any circumstances?" Editha asked, with a searching look into his face.

"Certainly not; and I desire you to hold no further communication with her."

"You will have to give me some good and sufficient reason for your wish before I shall feel called upon to comply with it," she returned, firmly, and calmly meeting his eye.

"I should think that by this time you had seen the folly of defying me," he said, with a fierceness that was startling. "But enough of this. I suppose you consent to return with me?"

"Yes, rather than have any more words about it; but I am very much disappointed," she returned, with a sigh, and beginning to think that Mr. Dalton was jealous of her sudden liking for Madam Sylvester, and that was why he was hurrying her away so.

"And please do not trouble yourself to inform Mr. Tressalia or any one else concerning our plans. I do not care to have my steps dogged again as they have been hither, and for which it seems I have you to thank," her father said, fretfully.

Editha glanced at him in a puzzled way; she could not understand him to-night.

That he was strangely excited over something she could see, for he was very pale, his eyes glowed fiercely, and he was very nervous and irritable, and she did not really believe his story regarding urgent business calling him home.

Somehow she became possessed with the idea that madam was in some way connected with this inexplicable move, but how or why she could not imagine.

"You had better call Annie, and I will help you pack your trunks, so that there will be nothing to do in the morning," Mr. Dalton said, rising and beginning to gather up some articles that lay on the table.

He was an expert at packing, and Editha, too utterly wearied out to feel equal to any effort, was glad to avail herself of this offer.

She went to call Annie, wondering if all her life-long

she would have to be subject to his caprices in this way, and feeling more sad than she could express.

In less than an hour, under the nimble and experienced fingers of Mr. Dalton and Annie, every article was packed, the trunks strapped, and labeled, and ready for the porter to take down in the morning.

Then the weary girl crept into bed, feeling more friendless and alone than ever before, and wept herself to sleep.

She had been forbidden to communicate with Mr. Tressalia regarding their departure, and she did not know whether she should ever meet him again, and it seemed such a shabby and unkind way to treat a friend who had sacrificed so much for her. She had been forbidden to hold any further communication with Madam Sylvester, for whom she was beginning to feel a strong affection, and all this by a man selfish and domineering, and determined to bend her to his lightest will.

She knew that she could refuse point-blank to obey him if she chose—she could go her own way and he his; but if she did this she would cut herself loose from every hold upon the old life, and from every natural tie—she would not have a friend left in the world, while Mr. Dalton would also be left alone.

Every day she was conscious that her affection for him waned more and more, but for her mother's sake she could not quite bear the thought of leaving him without any restraining influences; besides, if she should pursue any such course, she would take away all his means of support, for his ten thousand was slipping through his fingers like water.

She never stopped to reason that this might be the very best thing she could do—that if he stood in a little wholesome fear of losing his present share of her handsome income, he would not be likely to domineer over her quite to such an extent. But the future looked darker than ever to her, and her heart was very sad and depressed.

At five o'clock the next morning Mr. Dalton came to arouse her and her maid, and as soon as she was dressed he sent her up a tempting little breakfast, with a word to take plenty of time and eat all she could.

This he had accomplished by heavily feeding one of the waiters the night before, and the steaming cup of rich chocolate, the broiled chicken done to a turn, the eggs and delicate toast, really formed an appetizing meal.

With all his selfishness and the determination to bend Editha to his own will, Mr. Dalton always liked to have her fare well, as well as dress richly and becomingly.

At six o'clock the early train steamed out of the Saratoga depot, and Editha could not refrain from dropping a few more tears behind her veil as a sad farewell to the friends whom she feared she should never meet again.

Mr. Dalton eyed her closely, but was too well pleased to have got her away so successfully to trouble her with any more words about the matter.

When they arrived in their own city, some time during the afternoon, Mr. Dalton proposed that they go directly to some hotel, since their own house was shut up, and no word had been sent to the servants to prepare for their coming.

Editha assented, and he engaged some cheerful, hand-some rooms in a first-class house for them both.

A week went by, and she thought it strange he should say no more about going home; and one day she ventured to suggest their return.

"I believe I like it here better," he said, glancing around the beautiful room.

"Better than our own spacious home?" Editha cried, astonished.

She knew that their elegant house on —th street had always been the pride of his heart, and the one thing he mourned about at Newport or anywhere else was the want of the comforts and conveniences of their elegantly appointed residence.

After his confession to Earle that he was a ruined man, his house and furniture mortgaged, and the mortgage liable to be foreclosed any day, she had generously proposed clearing it off, and it was now free from debt.

"Yes," he replied to her surprised remark; "the house seems so large and lonely with only two people in it besides the servants, and really I have never been so comfortable at any hotel before."

"I know; but one has so much more freedom in one's own home," Editha said, disappointed.

Hotel life was always obnoxious to her, and her father knew it, too. But her preferences were of minor importance to him.

"Yes," he said; "but there is a great deal of care in providing for a family, and I shall get rid of all that if we board. I propose that we rent the house for awhile; it will give us a snug little sum, and it will be more economical to live this way."

Editha opened her eyes wide at this new departure. She had never heard her father preach economy before; but

she saw at once where the advantage was coming, and in her heart she grew very indignant toward him.

If he rented the house it would indeed bring *him* a handsome sum, which he would pocket, while the hotel bill would doubtless come out of her income; but though she read him correctly, in a measure, she did not give him credit for the deep scheme he had in mind.

He thought that Mr. Tressalia, on finding that they had again taken French leave, would try to find them, and follow them as he had done before; and if he, with madam and her brother, should take a notion to seek them there in the city, and should find their house either closed or rented, they would come to the conclusion that they were still absent at some summer resort, and go away again. Thus he would escape them entirely.

But the matter ended, as all such matters ended, in Editha's yielding assent.

* * * * *

Some things in Editha's story had moved Madam Sylvester deeply, and she passed a sleepless night after her return to the hotel on the night of the garden-party.

She lay reviewing all the ground, recalling little items which at the time possessed no significance to her, but which now impressed her powerfully; she thought of the strange attraction she felt toward the young girl, and revolved many other things of which only she and her brother knew anything about, until it seemed as if she could not wait for morning to come.

As soon as Mr. Tressalia made his appearance she sought him and asked him a few questions that she had intended asking Editha the night before, but had not had an opportunity, and the effect which his answers produced upon her startled him not a little.

She lost her self-possession entirely, trembled, and grew frightfully pale, while the tears fairly rained over her fine face as, grasping both his hands in hers, she exclaimed:

"My friend Paul, you have proved yourself a good *genie* more than once; and now shall I tell you something you will like to know?"

Of course he was very curious about the matter; but the nature of the secret cannot be disclosed just here, although he deemed it of so much importance that he felt justified in seeking Mr. Dalton at once, to demand an explanation regarding some things that had occurred during his early life.

He came back to madam with the startling intelligence that Mr. Dalton and his party had left on the early train.

"Gone?" almost shrieked Madam Sylvester. "He knew it—he knew what I have told you. I remember how he appeared last night when he met me, and now he has fled to escape me."

Both Paul and Mr. Gustave Sylvester were on their mettle now, and proceeded to ascertain whither Mr. Dalton had gone.

The waiter who had served them, and the porter who had assisted in removing their trunks, were interviewed and feed, but neither had noticed the labels on the departing visitors baggage, and so their destination was a matter of doubt.

But that afternoon madam's party also bade adieu to Saratoga, their object being to ferret out the hiding-place of Sumner Dalton, and compel him to do an act of justice long delayed.

CHAPTER XLI

TOM DRAKE'S BEWILDERMENT

WE have left Earle for a long time in his magnificent loneliness at Wycliffe.

But magnificent loneliness it indeed was, for in his great house there was not a soul to whom he could go for either sympathy or cheer.

He was surrounded on every hand by everything that almost unlimited wealth could buy; he possessed one of the finest estates in England, and farms and forests in France, which, as yet, he had never seen; he occupied a position second to none save royalty; he had the finest horses and carriages in the county; cattle and hounds of choicest breed; he had all this, and yet he was heart-sick with a bitterness that seemed unbearable.

He could interest himself in nothing—he took pleasure in nothing—all his fair domains and riches were like a mockery to him; he never stood in the oriel window that looked out from the center of the main building at Wycliffe, and viewed the broad expanse spread out before him, and beautiful as Eden's fair gardens, without feeling that he was cursed worse even than Adam and Eve were cursed when driven from Paradise.

His beautiful gardens, shining streams stocked with finest

trout, broad fields of waving golden grain, the noble park with its grand old trees, God's most glorious handiwork, all mocked him with their loveliness.

It was as if they said to him, "You can have all this—you can revel in everything that serves to make the world bright and beautiful; you can buy and sell, and get gain, add to your stores, and get fame and honor, but after all is told, you must ever carry a desolate heart in your bosom; you can never possess the one jewel worth sevenfold more than all you possess; you can never behold the fair face, dearer than all the world, beaming upon you in your home as you go and come on the round of daily duties.

What did it amount to?—of what value was it all to him if he could not share it with the only woman whom he could ever love?

He forced himself day after day to go over the estate to see that everything was in order, and that his commands were properly obeyed; but there was no heart in anything that he did, while the servants and workmen all wondered to see him so sad and dispirited.

The interior of Wycliffe was in keeping with the surroundings.

Entering the wide and lofty hall, with its carpetings of velvet, its panelings of polished oak, its rich furnishings, its statuary and pictures, one gained something of an idea of the luxury awaiting beyond.

Upon one side of this hall was a suite of parlors—three in number.

The first and third were large lofty rooms and furnished alike. The ceilings were paneled and painted in the most exquisite designs. The walls were delicately tinted, with rosewood dados, in which were set panels of variegated marble beautifully carved. The carpets were of a bright and graceful pattern, and of richest texture, the hangings of crimson plush, and the furniture, no two pieces of which were alike, was upholstered to match.

The middle room was larger than the other two, and even more dazzling in its furnishings, and was separated from the others by arches, supported by graceful marble columns richly carved. The walls were delicately tinted, the same as in the other rooms, but the dados were of white Italian marble. The ceiling was painted with daisies and buttercups, arranged in most tasteful design; the carpet was a marvel of richness and delicate beauty—a white ground dotted with golden heads of wheat; the curtains were of golden satin festooned with lace; the furniture, of

different kinds of precious wood, inlaid with gold and pearl, was cushioned with white satin brocaded with golden coreopsis; the lambrequins, which were of velvet embroidered with daisies, gave a superb effect to the whole.

Every accessory in the way of mirrors, etageres, pictures, statuary, etc., was perfect, and the elegance of the whole suite it would be difficult to exceed.

On the opposite side of the hall were the library, sitting-rooms, and dining-room, while leading from the latter was a very fine conservatory.

Above, there were suites of rooms for the family and guests, and all in keeping with the elegance of those below; and if wealth and the good things it brings could possibly gladden the heart of man, Earle Wayne, Marquis of Wycliffe, ought to be a very happy one.

There is an old saying, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and we might add, heavy is the heart whose all lies in a weighty purse, for in all England it would not have been possible to find a more wretched being than Earle Wayne.

And so the time went by until there came a strange break in the monotony of his life—the adventure of which Mr. Tressalia had told Editha.

He had been told by one of the servants, during the day before, that a suspicious-looking character was prowling about the place; but he did not pay much attention to the matter, and when night came he retired as usual, and went to sleep without a thought of danger.

About two in the morning he had been awakened by the sound of muffled footsteps in his dressing-room. The next moment he saw the flash of a dark lantern, and knew there was mischief brewing.

As before related, it was but the work of a second for him to reach out and grasp his revolver, which, remembering the robbery at Mr. Dalton's, he always kept by him ready for use.

When the man passed between his bed and the window, he knew that was his best chance, and fired.

The intruder dropped instantly, with a groan, and his lantern went out as it fell to the floor.

Earle was out of bed and had struck a light in less time than it takes to tell it.

"Who are you?" he demanded, stooping over his fallen foe.

Then he started back with an exclamation of surprise, as he immediately recognized the wretch in whose power

he had found Editha, and who had so cleverly escaped from him that morning in the hotel.

It was indeed Tom Drake, and his career as a midnight robber was ended for all time.

He appeared to be suffering terribly, and, upon examination, Earle found that the ball had entered the leg just below the thigh, and, as he could not move it, had probably shattered the bone. Now that his enemy was fallen, Earle's sympathies were at once aroused. Suffering in any form always touched his heart.

"Well, my man," he said, kindly, as he bent over him, "what am I going to do for you, I wonder?"

"I guess you've done for me already," was the rough response, accompanied by a fearful oath and a groan as he recognized his captor.

"I'm very sorry to cause you suffering, but 'self-preservation is the first law of nature,' you know," Earle answered, as he stepped quickly to the bell-cord and gave it a violent pull.

In less than five minutes a servant appeared in answer to the summons.

"Here, Robert," Earle said, as composedly as if nothing had happened; "I have invited a stranger to stop with me for a little while. Lend a hand, and we will take him across the hall to the south suite; then I want you to go for Dr. Sargeant as quickly as possible."

The burglar was borne to the rooms mentioned, but carefully as he was handled, he fainted during the removal, and was a long time regaining consciousness afterward.

The doctor arrived in about three-quarters of an hour, and, after much difficulty and probing, succeeded in extracting the ball. The ugly wound was then dressed, and the patient made as comfortable as possible.

As the physician was about departing, Earle sought him privately.

"If you please," he said, "I would like nothing said about this affair. I do not wish to create any sensation, and the country will be alive with excitement if the events of to-night become known."

"But, my lord, the man ought to be given up to justice," said the physician, with a frown.

"No one knows better than yourself that he is no fit subject for justice now, nor will he be for a good while to come."

"That is so. He'll have a hard time of it before he gets through. The bone is shattered. There will be fever,

and a great deal of pain; while if mortification sets in, he'll get justice in another world."

"Then please oblige me by keeping the matter quiet, and do the best you can for him at my expense."

"Surely you don't mean to keep the fellow here?" exclaimed the doctor, in amazement.

"Certainly. What did you suppose I would do with him?" Earle asked quietly.

"Send him to the alms-house or hospital. It belongs to the authorities to take care of such scamps."

"If a friend of yours had been injured in this way, would you advocate sending him to the hospital? Would the excitement and fatigue of the removal be beneficial?" Earle asked pointedly.

"No; inflammation would probably follow, and the patient would doubtless die," the physician coolly admitted.

"That is the way I reasoned the question; therefore I hold myself, in a measure, responsible for this man's life," was the grave reply.

"The earth would be well rid of a villain," answered the doctor, gruffly. "It was only the luck of the thing that prevented your being where he is now, or perhaps a corpse."

"Not 'luck,' my friend, but the hand of Providence," Earle interposed, with his rare smile. "Your judgment and my conscious tell me that the man will die unless he has the very best of care. He must be kept quiet, and free from anxiety; so I have decided that he shall remain here until he recovers."

"But who will take care of him?" asked the physician, his gruffness all gone, and a look that was not disapprobation in his eye.

"I will see that he lacks for no care or attention; as a wounded and suffering man, he will be the same to me as a friend or guest until he gets well; and as such I shall expect you will also exercise your utmost skill, and do the very best you can for him," Earle said, quietly.

"Well, well, well!" muttered the astonished disciple of Esculapius; and then he stood regarding his companion for a moment, with raised eyebrows, and his mouth puckered into the smallest possible compass.

"Unless you object to treating such a patient," Earle added, with a little hauteur.

"No, no, no; bless you, no!" Dr. Sargeant returned quickly. "I will do my very best for the poor wretch; you are right—it would be sacrificing his life to have him removed, and you may rely upon my discretion."

And the noted doctor went away somewhat mystified as to what manner of man the young marquis might be, that he was willing to turn his magnificent home into a hospital for thieves and robbers.

Earle went back to his charge, whom he found restless, feverish and burning with intolerable thirst.

He swore savagely as Earle made his appearance, and defiantly demanded what he was going to do with him.

"Take care of you until you get on your legs again," was the calm reply, as he held some pleasant, cooling drink to the man's parched lips.

He drank eagerly, and then fell back among the soft pillows with a groan.

"Bosh! that's a likely story!" he returned, after a minute, with an angry flash of his eyes; "out with it, and don't keep me in suspense; I've enough to bear with this pain."

"So you have, poor fellow!" Earle answered, kindly; "and it is just as I have told you—you are to stay here and be nursed until you get well."

"What! stay here?" and the man's eyes wandered around the luxurious apartment in a look of amazement.

"Yes, in this very room. Don't you know that you cannot bear to be removed?"

"I don't feel much like it, that's a fact," he said, suppressing another groan; "but"—with a keen look into the kind face above him—"what right have *you* to say it?"

"The right of ownership—I am master here."

"*You!*"

"Yes; you recognize me, then?"

"Of course I do; and you knew me *instanter*, which isn't strange, considering one isn't likely to forget a phiz like mine; but—but——"

"But you had no idea that you were breaking into *my* house when you came here last night," interrupted Earle.

"No; I'll be —— if I did!" was the irreverent but energetic reply.

"There has been a change in my circumstances of late."

"I should think so! Then *you* are the Marquis of Wycliffe?"

"Yes. What did you expect to find here in the way of plunder?"

"I may as well own up, I suppose, since I'm where I can't help myself," the man replied, recklessly. "I was after the family jewels, which I was told were kept here."

"They are not here. I had them deposited in the treasure vault more than a month ago. There was only a little money

in my safe, for I had paid off my help only yesterday; so you see, my friend, you have had your sin and risked your life for nothing," Earle said, gravely.

Tom Drake swore savagely again at this information.

"Do not be profane—indeed I must request you to drop that sort of talk while you are here," Earle said, with decision.

"And you really don't mean to send me to the hospital?"

"No, indeed. I do not need to tell you that you have a long, hard job before you from the wound my ball gave you, and that it will be a good while before you will get about again."

Earle thought he might as well talk of things just as they were. Tom Drake nodded assent, a look of grim endurance on his ugly face.

"And," continued Earle, "unless you have good care—the very best care—it is doubtful whether you ever have the use of your leg again."

"And what should that matter to *you*?" was the gruff query, accompanied by a suspicious glance.

"It matters this to me: One whom I profess to serve has bidden me to care for the sick and needy," Earle said, gently.

"Humph! that's all cant. You'll watch me as a cat does a mouse, and just as soon as I begin to spruce up a little, you'll hand me over to her majesty's minions, and I shall have a nice little ornament attached to my leg, eh?"

He tried to put a bold front on, but it was evident that he experienced considerable anxiety regarding his future.

"There will be time enough to talk of that matter by and by," Earle answered; indeed, he had not given a thought to the subject, and had no idea what course he should pursue.

"Now I have to give you this quieting powder," he added, taking up one from the table, "and the doctor wishes you to get all the rest and sleep you can before the inflammation increases."

He mixed the powder in some kind of tempting jelly, the man watching him curiously all the time.

"Who is going to take care of me?" he asked, after he had swallowed it and taken a cooling draught.

"I shall take care of you for the present."

"You!" with another curious look. "I suppose you've plenty of servants?"

"Yes."

"They would do to look after a chap like me; and"—

speaking more humbly than he had yet done—"this is too fine a room to upset on my account."

This was encouraging; it showed that the wretch had a little feeling and regret for the trouble he was giving.

Earle bent nearer and said, in a friendly tone:

"I shall not trust you to the care of servants until the doctor pronounces your wound to be mending. If you should be neglected ever so little, there is no telling what the result might be. As for the room, you need give yourself no uneasiness about it; you are to have just as much attention as if you were my friend or my brother. Now try to forget that you have been my enemy, as I shall; for as you are situated now, I feel only sympathy for you. You must not talk any more, but try to get some rest."

Earle smoothed the tumbled bed-clothes, changed the wet cloth upon the sufferer's burning head, drew down the curtains to shade the light from his eyes, and was about to seat himself at a distance and leave him to sleep, when his voice again arrested him.

"Say!"

"Well?" he asked, again coming to his side to see if he wished anything.

The man hesitated a minute while he searched his face keenly, and then burst forth:

"I am *cussed* if I can make out what kind of a chap you are, anyhow!"

Earle smiled slightly at his evident perplexity, and the invalid continued:

"First, you hit a fellow a swinger on the back of the head that knocks the life out of him, and makes one think that the fury of seven Jupiters is concentrated in you; next, you shoot him with a revolver, and then turn around and nurse him as tender as a woman—I can't make it out."

"I did give you a heavy blow that night in the hotel, I admit; the case was desperate, and I knew I must not fail to lay you out the first time. If you had not escaped, I should have given you up to the authorities, and you would doubtless have been serving out your sentence now, instead of lying here. But you are wounded and suffering, you will probably, be sick a long time, and however much I may think you deserve punishment for your past crimes, your condition appeals to my humanity. As a sufferer, you are, instead of an enemy and a robber, my neighbor, my friend, and as such I shall treat you while you lie here," Earle explained, and there was no mistaking the friendliness of his tones.

"Your neighbor! your friend!" Tom Drake repeated, in

low, suppressed tones, and feeling almost as if he had got into a new world.

"Yes, just that; and now, to ease your mind and make you trust me, I will tell you that no one save the doctor, myself, and my servants, know what transpired last night, and no one else will know of the affair while you are sick here. Now go to sleep, if you can."

Earle moved away without giving him a chance to reply, the man watching his retreating figure in stupid amazement.

CHAPTER XLII

TOM DRAKE'S TRUST

TOM DRAKE did have a hard time, as the physician predicted and Earle feared.

He paid dearly for his one night's adventure within the walls of Wycliffe; and yet, perchance, the end will prove it to have been a "blessing in disguise."

For three weeks he raved in the wildest delirium of fever, unconscious alike of his own condition, the care he was receiving, or the trouble and weariness he caused, and it was three weeks longer before the skilful physician pronounced him out of danger, or would give any hope that the wounded limb could be saved.

"Save it if you can, doctor; the poor fellow has had a rough time of it, and I should dislike to send him away from here a cripple," Earle had pleaded, when the doctor spoke of amputation.

"He will be a cripple any way; so much of the bone is diseased and will have to come out, that the leg will always be weak, and he will be lame, even if we save it. But for your sake I will do my best, though it is more than the wretch deserves," grumbled the physician.

He had not much faith or patience in nursing the "miserable wretch," as he called him.

"Like enough he will turn round and cut your throat, some fine day, when he gets well. Such people have no feeling, no gratitude; they are like the brutes and have no souls, and should be treated accordingly."

"Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these," Earle gravely repeated once, after one of the doctor's outbursts.

"Humph! such high-toned philanthropy will doubtless be rewarded in a way you don't expect."

But with all his apparent gruffness and contempt for the kindness Earle was bestowing upon the unfortunate criminal, the young marquis could see that he was always very gentle with him, and was satisfied that he was bestowing the very best treatment that his knowledge and skill could suggest.

When at last the fever left him he lay weak as a baby, and only able to be lifted gently in the arms of strong men when he wished to change his position.

He did not look nearly so repulsive to Earle as he lay there so pale, and thin, and helpless, and a great pity crept into his heart for this brother-man whose life had been so steeped in sin and infamy.

He had scarcely left him during those six long weeks when he lay in such danger, catching what rest he could while his patient slept, and lying upon a couch near his bed; and Earle himself looked almost as if he had had a fit of sickness, he was so worn and weary with his watching.

It was six weeks longer before Tom Drake could be dressed and move about his room, supported by a servant on one side and a crutch on the other.

He had grown more quiet and gentle in his manner during these weeks of convalescence. After regaining consciousness when his fever turned, his speech became more chaste, no oath left his lips to offend Earle's ears, while now and then some expression of gratitude, rough though it was, would escape him for the attention and kindness he was receiving.

He became very thoughtful, even sad at times, and then Earle would bring some interesting book and read to him; but though he listened attentively, and appeared grateful for the attention, yet he could see that he did not really enjoy it, and often grew nervous at the monotonous sound of his voice.

One day he brought in a beautiful chess-table, and, after arranging the curiously carved men upon it, asked him if he would like to learn the game.

He was astonished to see his face light up with delight, as he exclaimed:

"Aha! them are real beauties, and now I can stand it."

He already knew the game—was even a skilful player and from that time until he was able to ride out, Earle was never at a loss to know how to amuse him.

But as he grew stronger, Earle could see that some heavy burden oppressed him, and when not riding or playing chess, he would sit in moody silence, his hands folded, his head bent, and a look of deep trouble on his face, and frequent sighs escaped him.

One day Earle had been reading the newspaper to him—the only thing of the literary kind in which he manifested any interest. A heavy sigh interrupted him, and looking up, he found his companion's eyes fixed sadly on his face, while apparently he had not heard a word that he had been reading.

"Well, Tom, are you feeling badly to-day?" Earle asked, laying down his paper.

"N-o," he returned, hesitatingly, and with some embarrassment.

Then, with an air of recklessness that Earle had not noticed before during all his sickness, he asked:

"I say, what kind of a place is Botany Bay?"

Earle started, the question was so entirely unexpected; but he understood at once now why he had been so sad and absent-minded of late. He had been thinking of his probable future.

"It is supposed to be rather a desolate kind of place," he said.

"Folks who are sent there at the expense of the Crown, don't get rich very fast, and it is somewhat inconvenient about getting away from there if one should happen to wish to visit his native land, eh?" Tom Drake said, with a ghastly attempt to be facetious.

"No," Earle replied, very gravely, and with a searching glance at his companion.

"There's some comfort in knowing a fellow hain't got to leave many behind him to grieve over him," he said, absently, and as if speaking more to himself than to Earle.

"Where do your friends reside?" he asked.

"All the friend I've got in the world, sir, is my old mother, and her I haven't seen for many a long year."

Earle thought there was a suspicious huskiness in his voice as he said this, and that a tear dropped on his hand as he turned quickly to look out of the window; but he might have been mistaken, and the man was still very weak after his long illness, and tears come unbidden at such a time.

"Your mother! Have you a mother living?"

"Yes, sir, as good a woman as ever drew breath," Tom said, heartily.

"Who was that woman you had at the hotel in New York?" Earle asked.

"That was one of—the profession. She was nothing to me, and I paid her well for that job. I—I——"

"Well?" Earle said, encouragingly, as he saw Tom evidently had something on his mind, and did not know just how to get rid of it.

"I ain't usually very white-livered nor tender-hearted, sir. I never thought I was thin-skinned; but—I—I want to tell you that that rascally business about the young lady has laid heavily on my mind this many a day. She was a—particular friend o' yours, weren't she?"

"Yes," Earle said, with a heavy sigh.

Tom Drake started at the sound, and shot an anxious glance at him, while he grew, if possible, paler than he was before.

"I—I hope, sir, no harm came to her from the mesmerizing," he said, in a sort of hushed tone.

"No; she is quite well now."

Tom looked intensely relieved, and went on, speaking with a rough kind of earnestness and gratitude:

"You've been wonderful good to me after it all; you've given me the best you have, and treated me as if I were a gentleman instead of a gallows-bird. That was a pesky job—that business with the girl. She was a pretty little thing, but plucky as the—I beg pardon, sir; but she was the most spirited little woman I ever set eyes on; and many a time it has given me the shivers, on waking up in the night, to think of her lying there, growing so pale and weak, dying by inches."

"It was a cruel thing to do," Earle said, with a far-away look and a very pale face.

He, too, often remembered that waxen face, with its great mournful eyes, in the still hours of the night; but that now was not the saddest of his troubles.

"You are right, sir," Tom went on, with a strange mixture of humility and defiance; "but I had three or four fat jobs on hand just at that time, and I knew that if John Loker's confession got abroad, there'd be no more work for me in the United States. I was going to crack a safe that very night, and had all my tools about me; so, as soon as you took the young lady off, I set to work, picked the locks, and we took to our heels with all the speed we had. You hadn't made much noise about the affair, so when madam and I walked out of the private entrance together, no one suspected us, and we got off scot-free. I knew it

wouldn't be safe for me to be seen around there after that, so I made for a steamer that was just ready to start out, and came over here to try my luck, never dreaming I'd fall into *your* clutches a second time."

"Have you been at this kind of thing long?" Earle asked.

"Nigh on to twenty years. I got in with a gang when I was a youngster, learned all the tricks of the trade, and have lived by my wits and a burglar's kit ever since."

"Have you, as a rule, found it a very *satisfactory* kind of business?" his listener asked, pointedly.

Tom Drake flushed a vivid crimson, and for an instant a fierce gleam of anger shot from his eye; then he burst out vehemently:

"*No, sir; I haven't.* I've always had to hide and sneak about like a whipped cur. It's all up with me now, though, and I might as well own to it first as last, and there's no comfort in it from beginning to end; but when a fellow once gets started in it, there don't seem to be any place to stop, however bad you may want to. I'd got kind of hardened to it, though, until—until that job at Dalton's that *you* got hauled up for. I've cursed myself times without number for that affair, but I hadn't the grit to own up and take my chances; though, if I did put on a bold front, every hair on my head stood on end when I saw you stand up so proud and calm, and take the sentence and never squeal."

Tom was getting excited over the remembrance, and his whole frame shook, while Earle could see the perspiration that had gathered on his upper lip.

His eyes were bent upon his hands, which were trembling with nervousness, or some other emotion, and his voice was not quite steady.

"You're a gentleman, sir, every inch of you," he went on, after a few minutes of awkward silence. "I've heard charity preached about no end of times, and never knew what it meant before. I suppose you won't believe it, or think I am capable of feeling it, but I do—I feel mean clear through, though I never would have owned to it before. Here I've been for three months and more, making a deal of trouble, being waited upon by your servants as if I was a prince, drinking your wine, and eating all sorts of nice things that I never thought to taste, while you've tended me until you're night about worn out yourself. I tell you I feel—mean! There, it's out—I couldn't hold it any longer; and if I have to wear a ball and chain all the rest of my life, I shall feel better to think I've said it;

and I shall never forget to my dying day that there was one man in the world who was willing to do a kindness to his worst enemy."

He had assumed a roughness of tone that had been unusual for the last few weeks, but Earle knew it was done to cover his emotion.

It was evident that he felt every word he uttered, and that the confession had cost him a great effort, as his nervousness and pallor testified.

It was apparent also that he expected no mercy, as his reference to Botany Bay and the ball and chain plainly showed. Earle pitied him during his long siege of suffering.

He was a man of no small amount of intelligence, and had evidently received a moderately good education before he began his career of crime, and if he had started right in life he would, no doubt, have made a smart man.

Earle had as yet come to no definite decision as to what course he should pursue regarding him when he should fully recover, and he could not bear to think of it even now.

He knew that his sentence, if tried and found guilty, would be a very severe one, and his own sad experience naturally made him incline to the side of mercy.

"But, Tom, whatever you may have been in the past, I do not consider that you are my enemy now," he said, kindly, when he had concluded his excited speech.

"But I *am*, sir. I have done you the worst wrong a man can do another—I've wronged you in *every* way—I'm a wretch, and whatever they do with me, it'll serve me right, and I'll never open my lips," he said, excitedly.

"Yes, you have wronged me, and I have suffered in your stead the worst disgrace that a man can suffer. But that is all past now; my innocence has been established, and no shadow of sin rests on my name—John Loker's confession accomplished that."

"But, sir, it could not give you back those three years of your life that—that you lost; you——"

"No," Earle interrupted; "but those three years, long and weary as they were, were not 'lost' by any means, Tom. They taught me a lesson of patience and trust which, perhaps, I never should have learned in any other way. It was a hard trial—a *bitter* trial!" Earle exclaimed, with a shudder, as something of the horror came back to him; "but"—in a reverent tone—"I know that nothing which God sends upon us, if it is rightly borne, can end in harm; nothing but our own sins can do that."

"Did you feel that way *then*?" Tom asked, regarding the young marquis with wonder.

"Not at first, perhaps, but it came to me after a little; for, Tom, I had a good Christian mother."

"Ay, and so had I," he replied, with a sigh that ended in what sounded very like a sob. But Tom was not strong, you know, and consequently more easily moved.

"She used to teach me that suffering was often blessing in disguise."

"I never heard that doctrine before, sir," Tom returned, looking down upon his emaciated hands, and thinking of his bandaged limb, which was still very sore.

"I suppose you would not think that the wound I gave you, and the terrible sickness which has followed, were blessings, would you, Tom?" Earle asked, with a smile, as he noticed the look and divined his thought.

"Hardly that, sir, when my reason tells me how it is all to end; but, sir, I'll say this much, my own mother couldn't have been kinder, nor given me better care; and, for the first time in my life, *I've learned what it is to trust a man!*" he said, earnestly.

"Thank you, Tom," Earle returned, heartily.

"You've no cause, sir. I should have killed you that night if I had known you were there and awake, and then the world would have lost a good man and gained another murderer. Perhaps, looking at it in that way, sir, the wound and the sickness were blessings in disguise, as you call them," he concluded, reflectively, and he shivered slightly as he spoke, as if the thought of crime had acquired a strange horror to him.

"We will not talk of this any more now," Earle said, fearing the excitement would be injurious to him. "I am only too glad that your life was spared and I did not slay you, even in self-defense. I am glad to know also that I have gained your confidence; and I firmly believe that if you should ever be free to go forth into the world again, you would never lift your hand to harm me or mine."

"Thank you, sir; it is kind of you to say that," was the humble reply.

"Now I want you to tell me something about your mother. She must be quite old," Earle continued, to change the subject.

"Sixty last March, sir, and I haven't seen her for twenty years, though I've sent her enough to give her a good living all that time. I used to—to—love my mother," he con-

cluded, as if rather ashamed to make confession of a sentiment so tender.

"Used to, Tom?"

"I ain't fit to own to love for anybody now, sir! and it would break her heart to know what I've been up to all these years.

"Where does she live?"

"At Farnham, in this county, sir."

"Here in England! Why, that is only twenty-five or thirty miles from here!" exclaimed Earle, in surprise.

"Yes, sir; and if I had made a good haul here, I was going down to see her, and settle something handsome on her," he frankly confessed, but his face flushed, nevertheless, at the acknowledgment.

"Wouldn't you like to see her now?" asked Earle.

"That I would, sir; and I suppose the poor old lady has been worrying and wondering what's happened to me, that I did not send my usual letter and money."

"Did you send her money regularly?"

Earle began to think there was a little green spot in the man's heart after all, and there might be some hope of reclaiming him even yet.

"Once in three months—sometimes more, sometimes less, as my luck was, but always *something* as often as that, though it's six months now since she's heard a word from me, poor old lady," he said, with a sigh.

"Why did you not tell me of this before? Your mother should not be allowed to want," Earle said, feeling a deep interest in the lonely mother.

"What right had I to burden you with my cares? You've had more than enough of me as it is," Tom replied, flushing more deeply than he had yet done.

It was evident that he felt his obligation to Earle was no light one.

Earle did not reply, and at that moment the door opened, and a man entered bearing a large tray, covered with a tempting array of viands that would have done the heart of an epicure good.

"You must be hungry, Tom, after this long walk, so while you are eating I will go away, as I have some letters to write," Earle said, rising.

Tom looked up at him with a troubled air, opened his lips as if to speak, shut them again resolutely, and then finally said, in a half-reckless, half-humble way:

"You can take my softness for what it's worth, sir; I couldn't help it; but—I'd have been broken on the wheel

before I'd have said as much to any one else. Tom Drake's known nothing but hard knocks for the last twenty years, until a bullet laid him here."

Earle went out of the room with a very grave face.

"If I was only sure," he murmured, with a deep-drawn sigh, as he passed into the library and shut the door

CHAPTER XLIII

TRUE NOBILITY

At the end of two hours Earle went back to his charge, with a letter in his hand.

Tom had been much refreshed by his nice dinner, and had been asleep for an hour.

But he now lay with a troubled, anxious expression on his face, which Earle could not fail to notice, even though his lips relaxed into a faint smile of welcome at his entrance.

He went up to the couch where he was reclining, and said, as he handed him the letter:

"I would like, if you feel able, to have you direct this letter to your mother, and after that you can read it, if you like. I have thought best to write her something of your illness, knowing that she must be very anxious at not hearing from you for so long. I would gladly have done so before had you spoken of it."

"Thank you, sir," Tom said, in a low voice, as, taking the envelope and the pen filled with ink that Earle had brought him, he directed the letter, in rather a trembling hand. Then he unfolded it and read the few simple words that were written within.

"DEAR MADAM," it said, "your son has been quite sick during the past three months, and I write this that you may feel no further anxiety regarding him. He is improving daily, and will, we hope, soon be well. Should you feel able to come to him, you will come directly to Wycliffe, where you will be cordially received. Inclosed you will find a sum which your son would have sent you before now had he been able to write. Very truly, EARLE WAYNE."

A five-pound note had been inclosed within the letter, at

the sight of which Tom Drake's lips suddenly tightened into a firm line.

He read the letter through, and, when he had finished, it dropped from his fingers upon the counterpane, and lay there while he turned his face to the wall, and for some minutes did not speak.

"What did you do that for?" he at last demanded, almost fiercely, but with lips that trembled in spite of himself.

"To comfort an aged, anxious mother, and give a sick fellow a chance to see a familiar face. You would surely like to see your mother, Tom?"

"Yes; but it will be a little hard on the old lady when she finds we'll have to part again so soon," he said, with a stony look in his eyes.

"Don't think of that now," Earle said, kindly. "Is there anything more you would like me to add to the letter?"

Tom shook his head, and, picking up the letter and the note, tried to replace them in the envelope, but his hand shook so that he could not do it.

Earle gently took them from him, folded and sealed the letter, and went out, leaving him alone.

A groan burst from the huge chest of the once hardened wretch as the door closed after him, and burying his head in his pillow, he lay a long time without moving.

The next morning he seemed very silent and much depressed. It was a fine day, and Earle took him for a drive in the beautiful park around Wycliffe.

He did not talk much, but appeared lost in thought, until the horses' heads were turned toward home; then he astonished Earle by seizing his hand and bursting out:

"Sir, can you believe a wretch like me has any heart left? I didn't think it myself, but you've got down to it at last. I'll plead guilty—though once I thought that ten thousand devils couldn't drive me to it; but you've broke me down completely; I can never hold up my head again, and I deserve the very worst they can give me. I'd like it over with and settled as soon as possible after *she* has been here. She'll not stay long, probably. I'm well enough not to be a burden here any longer, and I'd feel easier in my mind to know just what is before me."

The poor fellow was frightfully pale, and so excited that his sentences were disjointed and broken, and spoken through teeth so tightly shut that Earle could hear them grate.

The young marquis was deeply affected; he had uttered no fawning or servile protestations of sorrow or shame,

asked for no mercy, expected none; but he could see that he was, as he said "completely broken down;" his heart had been melted by kindness, and little shoots of the original good that was in him had begun to spring up in the unusual atmosphere by which he had recently been surrounded.

Earle believed that a great and radical change was begun in the man, and, if rightly dealt with now, he might be saved.

Kindness had melted him; then why had he not a right to feel that kindness would hold him and mold him anew? His was undoubtedly one of those natures which grow reckless and harden itself against everything like stern justice and punishment, and only grow more desperate at the thought of penalty.

If tried and sentenced now for the attempt at robbery, even though he might protest himself deserving of it, yet he would go to his doom in dogged, sullen silence; nothing would ever reach his better nature again, and he would die as miserable as he had lived.

"Tom," Earle said, gravely, after a thoughtful silence, during which these things had passed through his mind, "from what you say, I judge that you regret your past life, and, if you were to live it over again, you would spend it very differently."

"Regrets won't do me any good, and I don't like to cry for quarter when I'm only getting my just deserts," he said, with a kind of reckless bravery; then he added, with a heavy sigh that spoke volumes: "But I think it would be sort of comforting to a chap if he could look back and feel that he'd *tried* to live like a—*man*."

"Then why not try to live like a 'man' in the future?" Earle said, earnestly, his fine face glowing with a noble purpose.

"Transportation for life isn't likely to give a body much courage for anything," the man answered, moodily, his face hardening at the thought.

"No; and I hope no such evil will ever overtake you to discourage you, if you really have a desire to mend your course. Tom, you expect that I am going to arraign you before a tribunal, and have you punished for the wrong you have done me; but—I am going to do no such thing."

A gasp interrupted him at this, and Tom Drake sank back in the carriage as if the intelligence had taken all his strength; but Earle went on:

"If you had appeared to have no regret for the past—if, as you gained in strength, you had exhibited no sorrow,

nor expressed any appreciation of what had been done for you, or any desire to retrieve your errors, I might have felt that it would be better for others that you should be put where you could do no further mischief. But if you really want to try to become a good man, I am willing to help you. I will be your friend; I will give you employment as soon as you are able for it, and as long as you show a disposition to live aright, I will keep the secret of your past, and no harm shall ever come to you on account of it. Now tell me, Tom, if you are willing to make the trial? Shall we start fair and square from this moment, and see how much better we can make the world for having lived in it?" and Earle turned to the astonished man with a frank, kindly smile on his earnest, handsome face. The man was speechless—dumb.

Such a proposal as this had never occurred to him. He had fully expected that as soon as he should be able to bear it he would be transferred from his present luxurious quarters to some vile prison, there to await his trial, and then he had no expectation of anything better than to be sentenced to banishment as a convict for a long term of years, or perhaps for life.

Instead, here was hope, happiness, and the prospects of earning an honest living held out to him, and by the hand of him whom he had so terribly wronged.

No words came to his lips to express his astonishment, nor the strange tumult of feelings that raged within his heart. His whole soul bowed down before the grand nature that could rise above his own injuries and do this noble thing.

Tamora, Queen of the Goth, when suing for the life of her first-born son, prayed thus before Titus Andronicus:

"Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?
Draw near them, then, in being merciful;
Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge."

And thus Earle Wayne partook of the nature of the gods; his mercy, his grand self-abnegation and forgiveness, with the helping hand held out so kindly to one of earth's lost and degraded ones, was indeed the surest badge of his nobility. And Marion Vance, in her meekness, had prophesied truly when she had told him, on her dying bed, that "good would come out of her sorrow." She had said:

"You may, perhaps, be a nobler man for having been reared in obscurity; you will, at all events, realize that a

noble character is more to be desired than a mere noble-sounding name."

He was now living out the pure precepts that she had so untiringly taught him during those long, sorrowful years when she was so sadly and uncomplainingly bearing her banishment and disgrace.

Tom Drake dropped his face upon his hands to hide the humility and reverence he could not speak, and the tears he could not stay and was ashamed to show.

Earle Wayne's enemy was utterly routed at last; he had stormed a citadel by a method of warfare hitherto untried, and it lay in ruins at his feet.

"I—I'm afraid I do not quite undersand. You will not have me arrested or tried—I im to be a free man?" Tom Drake breathed, in low, suppressed tones.

"No; if you are sentenced to drag out a weary term of years as a convict, you would become discouraged, and be ready for almost any desperate deed if you should live to return; and, Tom, I have come to believe that you would really like to lead a different life from what your past has been."

"I would, sir, I would; but I never should have thought of it but for you—but for that bullet. It was indeed, as you said, a 'blessing in disguise,' " he said, weakly but earnestly.

Earle smiled his rare, luminous smile, then said, gravely:

"Then I will help you all I can; but you must do your share also; it cannot be done in a moment, and you must not get disheartened. It will be something like this wound of yours; sin, like the bullet, has entered deep—the disease lies deep, and only the most rigid and skilful handling, with patient endurance, will work the cure."

He did not preach him a long sermon on human depravity, original sin, and the wrath of God.

This little warning was all he then gave, hoping by practical illustration to draw him by and by nearer to the Divine Master whose commands he was endeavoring to obey.

"And you—you make no account of anything? You forgive all those three years—the harm to the girl? *How can you?*" and the man lifted his earnest, wondering eyes to the grand face at his side.

"Yes, Tom, I can forgive it all," Earle said; but his face grew pale and a trifle pained at the remembrance of all that those words called up; "and I shall feel that the experience was not in vain if *you* do not disappoint my expectations. If you will faithfully and honestly strive to overcome what-

ever there is of evil within you, or whatever may tempt you in the future, I shall feel that your character reclaimed is the 'good' that has come out of my 'sorrow.' Tom, will you strive to make an honest man, God's noblest work, of yourself? I want your promise."

"Sir, from the bottom of my heart I'd *like* to be an honest man, but—I'm afraid I can't stand it," he said, huskily.

"Can't stand what, Tom?" Earle asked, with a look of perplexity and anxiety.

Were the temptations and habits of the old life so strong that he could not relinquish or overcome them?

"I feel as if a millstone had crushed me; I'm afraid I can't stand it to face you day after day, with the memory of all I've done staring me in the face."

Earle's face lighted—this was the best proof he had had of the man's sincerity.

"Tom, I want to tell you a little story; you will recognize it, perhaps, as you say your mother is a Christian woman. There was once a Man who was crushed beneath the sins of a world. He wore a crown of thorns, and the purple robe of scorn and derision. His tender flesh was pierced, bruised, and mangled by His enemies, and His only cry was, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' There came a time when I realized that *my* sins helped to do all this, and I felt something, as you say, as if a 'millstone had crushed me,' and as if I could never live in His presence with the memory of it ever in my mind. But I read in His word, 'Thy sins are remembered no more against thee *forever*; they are *blotted out*.' The same word tells me to 'forgive as I am forgiven.' Of course we cannot actually forget all that we have suffered, nor who was the immediate cause of it, but we can cherish no evil—we can regard and treat as kindly those who have injured us as if it had never been. That is the way I want to 'blot out' all the past between you and me. Do you understand me, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," Tom Drake said, in scarcely audible tones, but his face was full of feeling and of an earnest purpose.

"May I feel then, that I can trust you *fully* from this hour?"

"You may, sir," very decidedly the reply came; and, after a moment's hesitation, he continued, in a resolute tone: "I'll not waste my breath nor weary you with promises; but, sir, I'll begin to *live* from this moment."

"That is right; and here is my hand to seal our com-

pact;" and the young Marquis of Wycliffe grasped the hand of poor degraded Tom Drake as heartily as if he had been another peer of the realm.

He had won an enemy—he had conquered a reckless, defiant human heart, with neither sword nor spear, but by the power of love and kindness.

"Thrice blessed Marion Vance! Out of her sorrow had grown her Christianity, out of her Christianity had grown the education of this noble man, and out of his nobility the salvation of another.

Who can estimate the mighty influence of a pure example and faithful precepts?

Did she, now looking down upon this scene, realize toward what all the dark and winding path of her desolate life had tended?

She had learned to *trust* while here, where the way was so dark that she could not see; and may we not hope that faith had now ended in sight, and that the joy she had missed on earth was increased a hundred fold in the better world?

Neither Earle nor his companion spoke again during the remainder of their drive.

Tom Drake went immediately to his rooms when they reached the house, and no one but himself and his Maker knew how he passed that solitary hour that followed his return.

Earle gave the reins to a groom, and went to the library to see if there were any letters, but a servant met him on the way and handed him a telegram that had just arrived. It was a cable dispatch from the United States.

CHAPTER XLV

SUMNER DALTON'S CONFESSION

THE telegram was from Paul Tressalia, and extremely startling and imperative in its nature.

"Mr. Dalton can live but a short time," it said, "and begs continually for you. Come at once. Editha also desires it."

Earle was deeply excited by what he read

George Sumner Dalton dying!—face to face at last with the terrible messenger who, sooner or later, comes to summon all!

He was asking for *him*—longing for the son whom he had wronged and hated all his life-long'

For the moment Earle's heart rebelled at the thought of going to him; for if he went, he felt he must be prepared to give him comfort in his last hours; he must be ready to forgive everything—his own and his mother's wrongs, and be at peace with the man who was soon to stand before the Supreme Judge to answer for his earthly career.

Could he do this in all sincerity?

He stood there in the grand hall of his ancestors, with bent head and stern, corrugated brow, asking himself these questions over and over again.

Then the words that he had spoken only a little while before to Tom Drake came to his mind:

"Forgive, *as we are forgiven.*"

It was as if Marion's gentle spirit, hovering over him, had whispered the words in his ear—as if from the realms of peace, where she dwelt, she had brought him an olive branch to bear across the waters to the erring, dying one.

"I will go," he said, at last, a pitiful expression replacing the stern look, a grave though kindly light beaming from his eyes. "I will go, and God help me to go in the right spirit. Editha, too, desires it," he repeated, reading from the telegram, "and that of itself should make me willing."

And yet, much as he longed to see the beloved one once more, he felt as if he could never endure a second parting from her. Then graver thoughts presented themselves.

If Mr. Dalton should die, what would become of Editha?

She had not a friend in the world on whom to depend; would she feel that she could now return with him and share his home?

The matter troubled him deeply, and yet he clearly felt that it would be his duty henceforth to protect and care for her.

He went into the library and consulted the papers.

A steamer would sail the next day from London, and he decided that he would go at once.

He might not be in time to see Mr. Dalton alive, but he would not delay; he would do his best to grant his request, let the result be what it might.

He disliked very much leaving Tom just at this time. He knew that he depended upon him for encouragement, and would doubtless be very much depressed, if not discouraged, if he went away for any length of time.

But it could not be helped, and the test might be bene-

ficial. It would at all events teach him self-reliance, and perhaps prove the man's sincerity better than in any other way.

He went at once to him, and said:

"Tom, I am very unexpectedly called away. I am sorry that it happened just at this time, but it cannot be helped. Can you manage with only the servants for company until your mother arrives?"

"Yes, sir; but will you be gone long?"

"I do not know how long; I cannot fix any definite time for my return, as it depends upon others rather than on myself. You will be quite lonely, and I am sorry on your account."

"Never mind me, sir; but—I hope it's no trouble on *my* account," and he glanced anxiously at the telegram, which Earle still had in his hand.

"No—oh, no. I may tell you, I suppose—it is more trouble for Miss Dalton; her father is dying, and they have sent for me," Earle explained.

"To the United States, sir!" Tom exclaimed, in dismay, and feeling as if some strong support was slipping from under him.

"Yes, and I may have to be absent a month or two, perhaps longer but you must try to make the best of it. Your mother will probably arrive by to-morrow, and I would be glad if she could remain with you until I return," Earle said, thinking his mother's influence, and love, and care would be the best guardians he could possibly leave in his absence.

"Thank you, sir," Tom answered, heartily then, after thinking a moment, he added, wistfully: "I am getting strong and well so fast that I would like to begin to do something, sir. If you could leave me some work I should be glad, and the time would not seem so long."

Earle thought a moment, and then asked:

"Are you good at accounts?"

"I used to be fair at them. I learned Comer's method after I went to America, thinking to make a business man of myself."

"Then if you would take the trouble to straighten out some accounts that got badly mixed during the last year of the old marquis' life, it would help me wonderfully."

Tom's face brightened at once.

"I should like it," he said, eagerly; and Earle felt better at once about leaving him, knowly that if he felt he was making himself useful, he would be more contented.

The next day found him on board the *Ethiopia*, bound

for New York, and scarcely able to control his impatience, even though the noble steamer, with favorable wind and weather, was plowing the pathless water with unusual speed.

At the end of eight days he stood once more upon American soil, and an hour or two later found him again ascending the steps of Mr. Dalton's residence.

His hand trembled as he pulled the bell, and his heart beat with heavy, painful strokes, so many memories, both sweet and bitter, agitated him.

A servant let him quietly in, and an ominous stillness at once struck a chill to his heart.

"Is Mr. Dalton living?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, but very low," was the reply.

He led him to the same little reception-room where he had seen Editha on that day before Christmas, and where she had given him that little bunch of holly, and wished him, not the stereotyped "Merry Christmas," but "peace, good-will to men," instead.

It came to him now, that sweet message, with strange vividness, and he grew suddenly calm and solemn as he realized that he had indeed come with "peace" in his heart, and "good-will" toward one who had been his life-long enemy.

He gave his card to the servant, and then sat down to wait. Would Editha come to greet him? he asked himself, and would he be able to meet her as a brother should meet a sister?

Fifteen minutes elapsed, and then a door softly opened again. Earle turned, his heart leaping to his throat, but it was not Editha.

He saw a strange but noble-looking woman coming toward him, and wondered to see her there.

He bowed courteously, but she cordially extended her hand, as her eyes sought his card, which the servant had given her, and upon which was simply engraven the two names he had always borne. He made no display of his title, nor of his new position.

"Mr. Wayne," she said, "we hardly expected you to-day; but I am very glad you have arrived. My name is Sylvester, and I am the only one at liberty to come to you just now."

Earle returned her greeting, wondering who Mrs. Sylvester could be—certainly not the housekeeper, for her manner and bearing forbade him to believe that she occupied that position; and he had heard Editha say they had no near relatives living.

She might be some friend or neighbor come in to relieve her and share her lonely vigils, he thought.

He inquired if Miss Dalton was well, and noticed that a queer little smile wreathed the lady's lips, as she replied: "Editha is quite well, and is sleeping just now. Mr. Dalton had an extremely distressing night, and she would persist in sitting up with him until nearly morning. The poor darling has been unremitting in her care, and is nearly worn out," Mrs. Sylvester concluded, speaking with great tenderness.

Earle then inquired concerning Mr. Dalton's illness and its cause.

"That is a long, long story, and I will leave it for Editha to tell you when she wakes, and you are rested. I will only say that it was brought on by excessive excitement, during which he ruptured a blood vessel."

Earle expressed great surprise at this, and madam continued:

"He recovered somewhat from the first attack of bleeding, and we were hoping his recovery would be permanent, when he had another, since which he has been rapidly failing. As soon as he became conscious that he could not live, he seemed to be exceedingly troubled regarding some injury which he had done you, and wished you sent for immediately. He will be much relieved to know of your arrival, for he has been very restless and anxious ever since Mr. Tressalia sent the telegram."

"Is there no possible hope of his recovery?"

"No; there is not the slightest hope of that. The physician does not think he can live many days. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go and see if he feels able to see you, as he wished to be told the moment you arrived," madam concluded, rising, and with a graceful bow, left him once more alone.

She had not been gone many minutes when a servant entered, bearing a tray, on which was arranged a most tempting lunch.

"Madam directed this to be served," explained the servant; and again Earle wondered who this cultivated woman could be, who was evidently a power in the house.

He partook of the lunch, however, with evident relish, for he was hungry, having been too eager and excited to do justice to his breakfast that morning.

Half an hour later madam returned, saying that Mr. Dalton was ready and anxious to see him.

He arose and followed her to the sick man's chamber, and almost wondering if it could be true that he was about to stand at his own father's death-bed, and if ever before a son stood in such strange relations toward a parent.

He was shocked at the change in Mr. Dalton.

Ghastly, wan, and panting with every breath, he lay bolstered up with pillows, and Earle knew at a glance that he could not live many days.

An expression of pain convulsed his features as the door opened and his anxious eyes rested upon the young man's handsome face and noble form; and then, with a slight motion of his head, he signified his wish for him to come and sit beside him.

It was a strange, sad meeting of a father and son.

The one so strong and manly, and in full vigor of life; the other pale, emaciated, and dying, and neither experiencing nor expressing any natural regard for the other.

Earle's humanity was touched as soon as he saw the sufferer. He forgot all his past bitterness, he forgot that this was one who claimed to be an implacable foe, who had said he "hated him and all that ever belonged to him." He only thought of him now as a sick and dying man who needed sympathy and care.

"You did not expect when you went away that when next we met you would find your enemy laid so low, did you?" Mr. Dalton asked, in a hollow voice, when Earle was seated, and searching his face with a keen glance.

"I have never wished you any ill, sir," he replied, respectfully.

"I cannot say the same regarding you, for there was nothing I would not have done, for the sake of the hatred I bore your mother, to have hurled you from the proud position you occupy."

"Shall we not drop all this now and forever?" Earle interrupted, gently, fearing he would become excited if this topic was renewed.

"No; I must have my say out now. I've been saving my strength for this, and I have much to tell you, and the sooner it is over with, the better for me. One's sentiments change when a body feels life slipping from his grasp, and I felt that I would like you to know before I die that I realize at last, instead of injuring others only, I have been my own worst enemy. I don't know *why* I should always have hated others for what has really been my own fault;

for all through my life my folly has been the cause of all my disappointments.

"I have seen a child get angry with his toys—his top or his ball, when it would not spin or bound as he wished it—and vent his anger by destroying them, when it was only his own lack of judgment and skill that prevented his enjoying them. I suppose it was that same trait in me, only in tenfold degree, that has made me wish to destroy every one who opposed or disappointed me in my schemes or ambition."

He paused a moment, and Earle watched him curiously. He had never heard anything so strange before.

"Had I lived for ten, twenty, or even forty years more, I suppose I should have gone on in the same way," Mr. Dalton resumed. "I suppose as long as I knew you were enjoying the position and possessions I had so coveted, I should have continued to hate you, and striven to do you injury. But my hatred can do you no further harm now, nor me any good where I am going; neither money nor position, the two things that I have most coveted all my life, can benefit me further. I have never believed in a God, have tried to believe that man was like the brutes, and consequently must get all the enjoyments possible out of this life; but now that I have come to this"—lifting his wasted hand and regarding it with a strange expression of wonder, and perplexity, and regret—"I do not feel quite so confident that God and eternity are not solemn truths. That the mind is something greater than the body, and will probably exist in another state, I am at last convinced; but I have no time to discuss metaphysics now. My life has been a failure, for I have missed *everything* for which I sought most eagerly. I have never known what it is to be really happy. I have done a great deal of evil, and I do not know a single human being that is better for my having lived in the world. The only good thing that I can think of connected with myself is, that no one will sorrow or be made unhappy by my death;" and the smile that accompanied these words was intensely bitter.

"I have told you how I disliked you from the first, simply because Richard Forrester was interested in you, and I was jealous of any one who was likely to win anything from him. You know how I scorned you because Editha took a girlish fancy to you, and you dared to treat her as if you considered yourself her equal. I was so angry that day in court that I could have blotted you out of existence had I possessed the power, and throttled her when she stood up

so fearlessly in that crowded room and asserted your innocence. I was afraid she would learn to love you, and persist in marrying you. I knew that Richard Forrester was rich, and that she would have all his money; but I meant she should get more, by making a wealthy marriage. The more *she* had, the more I thought *I* should have, and stand the higher in the world for it."

Again he paused to rest, and Earle would have been glad if he would cease entirely. He knew all this, and he could not see the good of its all being rehearsed, neither could he understand toward what it was drifting; but he was soon to know, and a great surprise awaited him.

"When Richard Forrester died," he began again, "and left you that ten thousand dollars, I vowed you should not have it, for I felt sure it would give you a start in life, and you would want to marry Editha. I was bound she should wed a rich man, and I would not be thwarted. Then I made the discovery of who you were; and if your sentence had been for life, I would not have lifted my finger to have had it mitigated in the slightest degree. I seemed to gloat over the fact that Marion's son, the son of the woman whose high spirit had prevented me from reaching the goal I sought, was thus disgraced, and, not knowing that she was dead, I thought I could imagine some of her sufferings on account of it.

"I do not wonder that you shudder," he said, seeing a quiver of pain run over Earle's body at this heartless speech; "and I can see now just how such fiendish malice appears to others. If I had known, however, that *my* marriage with Marion had been legal, you may be sure I should have adopted a very different course. If, when from motives of curiosity I opened that package belonging to you, I had discovered those papers in the cardboard pocket, my ambition and selfishness would have prompted me to court the favor of the heir of Wycliffe. But I did *not* know, and when you told me, and refused to let me share your honors, my ire increased tenfold, and I vowed I would make you suffer for it in some way."

Earle's face was very grave and pale as he listened, and it seemed as if he was almost living over again the troubles he had been through, to be reminded of them in this way.

"There was only *one* way that I could do this," Mr. Dalton said, with a troubled glance at the white, set face by his side," and that was through Editha. You loved her, and she loved you, and I gloated over the fact that through her I could make you miserable, though you stood on the

very pinnacle of where I had longed to climb, *and even though I sacrificed her in so doing.*"

Earle's lips twitched nervously at this, and, had not the man before him been helpless and dying, his indignation must have burst forth at this sartling and inhuman statement.

Mr. Dalton noticed his emotion, and his lips curled in a bitter smile.

"One is not often allowed the privilege of reading such a page of heart-history as I am turning for you to-day; one does not often meet a *father* who could cherish such bitterness and antagonism toward his only son, and so utterly devoid of natural affection also for the child whom he has reared from infancy; but I will make no half-confession—I want you to know just how black my record has been, and then I will make what restitution there is in my power.

"With all my other sins, I had a secret that I had kept for more than twenty years, and expected it would die with me. I did not believe there was a soul living who knew aught of it, or who could ever discover it.

"But there was; justice was on my track, and, like an avenging Nemesis, pursued me with a relentless determination. I fled, I hid, I vowed I would not be thwarted out of *every* scheme I had formed, but all to no purpose, and one day I was brought face to face with a foe, of whose existence I had not dreamed until only a short time before.

"Foiled at every point, my last weapon wrested from me, I lost all control of myself, and in my anger and mortification ruptured a blood-vessel in the lungs, and knew that my days were numbered.

"It was not a pleasant thing to know that death had set his mark upon me, and for awhile I tried to fight the conviction; but it was of no use, and then I began to think; and one has very different ideas regarding the end and aim of man, when 'Death sits grinning his horrible, ghastly smile upon him,' than when in the full vigor of life.

"Like two vivid pictures, your life and mine arose up before me—my own, full of pride, ambition, and selfishness, with no principle of truth or goodness in it, and ending in utter wreck; yours, in the face of mountain-like difficulties, filled with the beauty of high resolves, noble purposes, and unwavering rectitude and nobility, not the least of which was the fact that even while smarting beneath the fiercest strokes of your enemy, you did not cease to

be generous—that ten thousand dollars, with all my arrogance and bravado, has lain heavy on my conscience ever since you made it over to me.

"I am nearly done. I could not rest—I could not die until I had told you all this. I do not ask you to forgive me; the words would seem but mockery to you. The purity of your life, standing out in such bold relief against the blackness of mine, enraged me. If I could have seen you angry—if I could really have found a flaw in you—perhaps I should not have always been so bitter. I say it always angered me, until I was obliged to lie here and think. Now it shames me, and I would be glad if I could annihilate from *your* memory the shame of having had such a father. I cannot make any atonement for the past to either you or Editha. I can only wish that your future may be as full of happiness as you both deserve, and perhaps I may be able to contribute a trifle to it by being the first to tell you that *Editha is not my child at all!*"

CHAPTER XLV

MADAM SYLVESTER'S STORY

EARLE nearly bounded from his seat at this startling intelligence, and then, controlling himself for the sake of the sick man, sank back into his chair with a low, suppressed cry, his face almost as colorless as that of the dying man's upon the pillow.

"Editha not your child!" he said at last, in a strained, unnatural voice, his heart beating with great heavy throbs.

"No; not a drop of my blood flows in her veins," Mr. Dalton panted.

His strength was all gone, now that his story was told, and it was with difficulty that he spoke at all.

"Who's child is she, then?" Earle asked, trembling with eagerness, a glad gleam leaping into his eyes in spite of his sad surroundings and his sympathy for the panting form upon the bed.

Madam Sylvester now came to the bedside.

She had entered so quietly a few moments before that neither Earle nor Mr. Dalton was aware of her presence until this moment.

"Mr. Dalton must rest now; he is nearly exhausted," she

said, adding: "I will summon the nurse, and as Editha is still sleeping, and you are doubtless anxious to have the mystery explained, I will finish the story of Editha's parentage."

Earle instantly arose, and a sudden thought made him glance at her more keenly than he had yet done; then, with a look of sympathy at the panting sufferer, he turned to follow her. Mr. Dalton had seen that look, however, and it stirred his soul to its very depths.

He reached out his wasted hand as if to stay him, and said, weakly, while his features writhed in pain:

"A good father might have been proud to own you as his son. As it is, I cannot even ask you to take my hand."

Earle turned quickly and bent over him, his manly face softened to almost womanly tenderness and beauty—not from the dawn of any filial affection! that could not be, after all the bitter past—but from pity and compassion for a soul standing alone upon the brink of eternity, with nothing to lean upon as he entered the dark valley of the shadow of death, and no hope in the mysterious future toward which he was hastening.

As his humanity would have prompted him to reach out his strong right hand to save either friend or foe in case of danger, so his grand nature yearned to lead this darkened mind into the light of hope.

"We will not talk of the past any more," he said, gently; "It is gone, and it is vain to dwell upon it. The future is what we must think of now."

"The future—my future! What will it be like, I wonder?" Sumner Dalton asked, helplessly, and searching that noble face with painful earnestness, as if he could tell him.

"The future means 'heaven' to those who are ready for it," was the grave, dignified reply.

"Yes, yes; but to those who are *not* ready for it?" came breathlessly from the blue lips of the sufferer.

"*All may* be ready for it if they will," Earle answered, in low, sweet tones. Then seeing how excited Mr. Dalton was becoming, he added: "You must rest now—you have talked long, and are very weary. I will come to you again when you have slept, and we will talk more of this."

"You will stay—you will not go away until—after——" the dying man began, wildly, but finished with a groan.

The thought of death was anguish.

"I shall stay for the present—as long as you need me," Earle replied, understanding him, and pitying him deeply.

A sigh of relief followed this assurance.

In the hour of his weakness and need he turned, with a strange feeling of confidence, to the strong, true nature which he had once so scorned and despised.

His eyes followed the manly form wistfully as it quietly passed from the room, then, with a weary sigh, he turned upon his pillow and slept.

Madam Sylvester led Earle back to the room where she had first met him, and motioning him to a chair, took one herself near him.

"I know you are anxious to see Editha," she said; "but she is not yet awake. I peeped into her room on my way to Mr. Dalton's, and the dear child has not moved since I looked in before. She was nearly worn out this morning when she went to rest. Now I will do as you say—leave this interesting story for her to finish, or relieve your suspense and tell you myself while she sleeps," she added, with her charming manner.

"Tell me by all means," Earle said, earnestly. "I cannot endure the suspense, and I am utterly amazed by Mr. Dalton's last statement to me."

"It is not to be wondered at, and your amazement probably will not end there. Your query, when he told you Editha was not his child, very naturally was, 'Whose is she, then?' My lord, *I am Editha's mother!*"

Earle looked the astonishment that he could not express, and yet the shadow of suspicion of this had crossed his mind just before leaving Mr. Dalton's room.

"I never believed anything would ever again give me such joy as this knowledge does," Earle said, with a deep-drawn sigh of thankfulness, and beginning to realize something of the joy that might be in store for him.

Editha, no longer regarded as a sister, might now be claimed as a wife.

Madam smiled. She greatly admired the handsome young marquis, and her heart was very light to know of the brilliant future that lay before her beautiful daughter.

"It gives me pleasure to hear you say that," she said. "And now, if you have patience, I will tell you my sad story and all regarding Editha's parentage, as I have already related it to her."

"I have patience," Earle said, smiling; and madam began:

"Nearly twenty-three years ago I met with the saddest loss that ever falls to the lot of woman—the loss of a love that would have brightened all my future life. From my early girlhood I had an affection for an own cousin, and

was beloved in return by him. As we grew older that affection increased, until at the age of eighteen I was betrothed to him. Soon after, he went to sea, hoping on his return to be able to make me his wife. He had a share in a trading-vessel, and, if they made a successful voyage, he hoped to realize a handsome sum, which, with what I already had, would enable him to support a wife. Three months later came the news of the loss of the vessel, and his name was among the list of those who perished. Our engagement had been a secret, and so it was only in secret that I could mourn. In the presence of others, of course, I must appear the same as usual, and so, to hide the grief that was burning my heart to ashes, I assumed a reckless gayety that deceived every one. About this time a stranger appeared in our circle. He was wealthy, fascinating, and very handsome. He appeared attracted by my beauty, as my friends were pleased to term my good looks, and paid me much attention. My family were pleased with him, I liked him, and when he offered me marriage I accepted him, thinking that perhaps, under new excitement and change of scene and country, I might find some balm for my wounded heart. We were married, and spent several months in traveling, and then contrary to my expectations my husband preferred to remain indefinitely in Paris, and we set up a home of our own in the suburbs of the city. Before the end of a year a little child was given to us—a blue-eyed, golden-haired daughter, whom we both loved with almost idolatrous affection, and it seemed as if Heaven had at last sent healing to my sore spirit, for I became calmly and quietly happy; my acute grief had passed, and, though my deepest affection was in the ocean grave of my sailor lover, yet I looked forward to a future of quiet happiness with the new ties that bound me to life.

“My baby—Editha we had named her—was only three months of age, when one day, as my husband and I were watching her as she lay crowing and laughing in her cradle, the door behind us opened and some one entered the room. We both turned, and saw a form gaunt and trembling, a face pale and wasted, but dearer than life to me. It was Louis Villemain, my lost lover, whom I believed lying cold in death at the bottom of the sea.

“I was young, impulsive, and not yet strong after the birth of my child, and the shock was more than I could bear. With one wild cry of joy, I sprang forward and threw myself upon his bosom, forgetting that I was already a wife and a mother, forgetful of my husband's presence—of every-

thing save that Louis was alive and had returned. I murmured fond, wild words of love and delight, words which a wife has no right to speak save in the ear of her husband, and mine, sitting there, listened horror-struck, and learned the whole. It was only when, exhausted with my joy, I lay weeping on Louis's bosom that I was at last aroused to a consciousness of what I had done, by my husband's stern sarcasm.

"What may be the meaning of this exceedingly affecting scene, allow me to ask?" he said, hissing the words between his teeth; and then with a shriek I realized our relative positions, and fell fainting to the floor.

"I need not dwell upon what followed," madam said, with a sigh, "when I came to myself. Louis was gone, and my husband, angry and wretched at discovering how he had been deceived, was very unreasonable, and poured forth such a storm of jealous wrath upon me that I was nearly crushed. I confessed everything to him then, I pleaded my sorrow and weakness, and implored his forgiveness and mercy, but he denounced me as an unfaithful wife, at least at heart, and vowed that from that day we should live as strangers, and yet, for our child's sake, every outward propriety must be observed. I was more wretched than I can express, and very unwisely poured forth my troubles into Louis's ear, when he came the next day and sought me alone. I could not deny that the old love was stronger than the new, and the future looked like darkest gloom to me—my husband's respect and confidence gone—my lover returned to look reproach upon me from sad and hollow eyes, and my conscience constantly upbraiding me for having married a good and noble man when I had no heart to give him. I felt like a forsaken thing, and, always morbidly sensitive, I was tenfold more so then in my weakened, nervous state. I do not pretend to excuse my sin—I can only tell it just as it happened. Louis, as wretched as myself, comforted me with the old, tender words that he used to speak, and, bemoaning my sad fate in being linked to such a cruel husband, urged me to fly with him on a new vessel that he was to command, and be happy in our own way. The vessel was to sail in a few days, and with passionate eloquence he pictured the delight of the free, beautiful, roving life we would lead. I consented, and one day, when my husband was absent for a few hours, I took my baby and fled. Louis had gone on before me, and was to meet me at the seaport town from which the vessel was to sail. Not being able to leave home until afternoon, I was

obliged to stop over night at a small town about half way from the port. I was more lonely than I can tell you, as alone and unprotected I retired and lay with my baby in my arms, thinking of what I had done. I thought of my dead mother and her early teachings—of the words she used to love and repeat from the sacred book, and the earnestness with which she used to impress their meaning upon me, and the horror and guilt of the step I was contemplating overwhelmed me. My baby awoke at midnight, and would not be coaxed to sleep again; so, lighting the candle, I lay there and watched her play, and talk, and coo in her charming little way. Every now and then she would stop, look around the room as if she knew she was in a strange place, and then glance up at me with great serious eyes that seemed to question my conduct and reproach my rashness. I thought of my husband, who, though he had been hasty and somewhat cruel in his reproaches, was yet a good, true man. I pictured the despair he would feel when he should return and find his wife and child gone, his home desolate, his name dishonored, and all the horror of my rash act rushed with overwhelming force upon me. I threw myself upon my knees beside my bed and wept out my repentance there, resolving that early morning should find me returning like the prodigal to my home. I acted upon that resolve, first dispatching a note to Louis telling him of my resolution, and entreating him not to come to me again, nor seek to hold any communication with me.

"I reached home at noon the next day, but my husband had already discovered my flight. I suppose I might have told him some story—that I had only been to visit a friend in my loneliness, or something of that kind, and he might have accepted it; but I did not; I went to him and confessed the whole, imploring his pardon, and swearing fidelity for the future. I think if he could have had time to think it over and consider the matter, he would have acted differently; but his heart was already too sore to bear more, and his naturally fierce temper swept all reason before it. He took my baby from my arms and bade me 'go,' refusing to believe I had not flown *with* Louis instead of to him. I prayed him to leave my child, my beautiful, blue-eyed, fair-haired Editha, but he told me I was not a fit mother to rear a child, and he refused me even the comfort of a parting caress. He said hard, cruel things to me in that fit of passion—words that broke my heart, seared my brain, and drove me nearly crazed from the sight of every familiar face. I never saw him again—I never heard aught of him for

long, long years. After I had recovered somewhat from the first shock of my wild grief I began to reason with myself. I knew I had sinned deeply—I had committed a great wrong in marrying one man when my heart was another's, even though I believed that other dead, and I had enhanced that wrong a hundred fold in yielding to Louis' persuasions and consenting to fly with him. True, I had repented before it was too late to turn back, but it was a bitter blow to my husband; it was an act of treachery, and I could not blame him for his first wild outbreak. But I felt that it was cruel in him to be so relentless when I had confessed all; if he had but been merciful—if he could but have consented to give me a place at his hearth-stone until he had tested my sincerity, I feel that a comparatively happy life might have eventually been ours. I wrote to him times without number, begging him to let me come and be the faithful wife and mother I knew I was capable of being; but he never returned me one word in reply—never told me aught of my child, over whom my heart has yearned as only a mother's heart can yearn for her only darling.

"A short time after our separation I received a letter from Louis telling me of his marriage with an Italian lady, and begging me to forgive him for the wrong he had done me in tempting me from my duty as a wife. A year later news of his death reached me, and then I sought my brother, the only living relative I then had. He received me kindly, and has devoted himself to my comfort and happiness ever since, and we have lived for each other and for the good we could do to others who have suffered and sinned. I have had much of peace—I have even known something of happiness, since no one can relieve the wants of others and witness their comfort and gratitude without being blessed for the good wrought. But I am wearying you with my long story," madam said, stopping, with a sad smile.

"No; it is thrillingly interesting, but so sad," Earle said, longing to hear the remainder.

"I shall soon finish now. I told you, I believe, that my husband was an American, did I not?"

"No; is it possible?" Earle exclaimed, greatly surprised.

"Yes; and for years I have longed to come to the United States to visit his native land, hoping that by some chance I might glean some news of him and my child. My brother and I visited the place that used to be his home, but he had been gone from there for many years. After the death of his parents he had removed to some city, but no one could tell us where, and no one knew anything of his having a child,

and were even surprised to learn that he had ever been married. We could trace him no farther, and I gave up all hope, believing that my child must have died before it reached this country, and so he had never owned the fact of his marriage.

"We thought we might as well visit some of the points of interest here before returning home, and it was while at Newport that I found Editha."

"Surely you could not have recognized her after so many years?" Earle said, thinking she meant to imply that.

"Oh, no, although we were both strongly attracted to each other at once. She was ill; she had seen sorrow something akin to mine—that I knew as soon as I looked into her sad eyes—and just as I had discovered its nature, and was seeking a better acquaintance with her, she and her father suddenly disappeared from Newport. I learned through Mr. Tressalia that they had gone to Saratoga, and, being determined to know something more of her, and wishing also to visit Saratoga, we followed them thither. Immediately upon our appearance Mr. Dalton became strangely excited, and behaved in the most unaccountable manner.

"We arrived at night, while they were at a garden-party. We went to seek them, and, after a short interview, Editha and Mr. Dalton withdrew. Early the next morning, before any of us had arisen, they had departed, leaving no trace behind them as to their destination."

"Aha! Mr. Dalton must have had some suspicion of who you were, and, for reasons of his own, desired to keep the knowledge from Editha," exclaimed Earle, getting really excited over this strange history.

CHAPTER XLVI

"WHAT A STRANGE STORY!"

"DID you ever meet Mr. Dalton before?" Earle asked, excusing himself for his involuntary interruption.

"No, never; but I will soon explain how he recognized me, though I should never have known anything of him—should never have found my child even then, had it not been for your cousin, Paul Tressalia," replied madam.

"Poor Paul!" Earle sighed, thinking how his hopes were doomed to be blighted at every turn.

"Mr. Tressalia has suffered deeply," madam returned, "but his is rising above it nobly. I really believe if it had not been for his kind and judicious care of Editha after he returned to Newport, she would have sunk into a decline. He bravely renounced all his hopes of winning her, when she told him that she could never love another, and devoted himself to cheering her, and no one has expressed himself more truly glad over these recent discoveries than your noble cousin."

"He is a truly brave man, and deserves a better fate than has overtaken him just in the prime of his life," Earle said, regretfully.

"A 'better fate' will yet come to him, I feel sure, and his life will yet be rounded and completed by the hand of One who knows best how to fashion the lives He has given us," madam answered, with grave thoughtfulness.

"As I told you," she continued, after a moment, "on our arrival at Saratoga, we repaired immediately to the garden-party, and while there I managed to draw Editha one side for a little quiet chat, during which she opened her heart to me. I had heard something of her sad story from Mr. Tressalia before, but she related it to me more fully. She spoke of her uncle several times, telling of his deep interest in you, of his fondness for her, and and that he had, in dying, bequeathed all his fortune to her, save the sum he had wished you to have. I casually inquired his name, but before she could reply, Mr. Dalton interrupted us and took Editha away. The next morning I arose quite early, considering the lateness of the hour that I had retired the night previous, feeling very restless, and apprehensive of I know not what.

"I met Mr. Tressalia in a small sitting-room as I went below, and immediately began talking of the conversation I had had with Editha the night before.

"What was Miss Dalton's uncle's name—the one who left her his fortune?" I asked, during the interview.

"Richard Forrester," he returned; and I sank into a chair, feeling as if a heavy hand had suddenly been laid upon my heart and stopped its beating.

"You will not wonder," madam continued, her face paling with emotion even then at the remembrance, "when I tell you that *Richard Forrester was my husband!*"

"Your husband!" repeated Earle, fairly dazed with astonishment.

"Yes, my husband, and Editha's father. I saw through it all in an instant. Mr. Dalton's wife was his sister, and to her he had committed his child. It was no wonder that I had been attracted toward her from the very first; it

was no wonder that, when I met her for the first time in Redwood Library at Newport, my heart thrilled with something stronger than sympathy for her sorrow and pity for her suffering. She was my own, own child, and it was the instinct of the mother claiming her offspring, even before she recognized her. She was my baby, my pet, my little bud of promise, which had been so cruelly wrested from my arms more than twenty years before."

And madam's tears flowed freely even now. Her joy was so new that she could not speak of it without weeping.

"What a strange, strange story!" Earle exclaimed. "Richard Forrester Editha's father! That accounts, then, for the intense love which he always seemed to bear her."

"He did love her, then—he did not visit her mother's sin upon the life of her child?" madam asked, eagerly.

"No, indeed; he seemed to love her most devotedly. She never came into his presence but that his eyes followed her every movement with a strange, intense gaze, at which I often wondered. But I cannot understand why he should have resigned his claim upon her—why he denied himself all the comfort of her love, and had her reared as Sumner Dalton's child," Earle said, thoughtfully.

"You will understand it as I go on," madam returned, wiping her tears. "Of course, after that discovery, I was nearly wild to claim my child, and Mr. Tressalia went at once to arouse Mr. Dalton and demand a full explanation of all the past in my behalf. You can imagine something of our consternation when he discovered that he had departed on an early train, taking Editha with him, and no one could tell us whither they had gone. We returned to Newport, thinking they might have gone back there, but they were not there. Mr. Tressalia said that Mr. Dalton had visited Long Branch the previous summer, and possibly we might find them there; so to Long Branch we repaired, but with the same success. We visited one or two other watering-places with a like result, and then returned to New York, thinking we might find them at home; but their house was closed, and we knew not which way to turn then. But I was desperate. The fact of Sumner Dalton's flying from me would have alone convinced me that Editha was my child if nothing else had, and I was determined I would never give up the chase until I found her.

"At last we discovered that they were boarding quietly at a hotel, and one morning while seated in their private parlor, Mr. Dalton reading, Editha sewing, we walked in

upon them unannounced, beyond a light knock upon their door.

"The look upon Mr. Dalton's face upon beholding us was a strange one—it was amazement, rage, and despair combined, while Editha immediately sprang forward with a cry of joy to welcome us.

"I am unable to account for this intrusion,' Mr. Dalton said, loftily, and instantly recovering his self-possession.

"I can explain it in a very few words,' I returned, calmly. 'I have come to claim my child!'

"I do not understand you,' he answered, with well-feigned surprise, but growing white as a piece of chalk at my words.

"You do understand me, Mr. Dalton,' I said, sternly, 'and you know that I speak the truth when I claim this dear girl as my child and Richard Forrester's.'

"I turned to clasp her in my arms, but she had sunk, white and trembling, into a chair.

"I should like to see your proofs of that statement,' Mr. Dalton sneered.

"I did not reply, but bending down, I took both of Editha's hands in mine, and said:

"My dear child, tell me the date of your birth.'

"Editha, I command you to hold no communication with that woman,' Mr. Dalton cried, shaking from head to foot with passion.

"Editha looked from one to the other in helpless amazement for a moment; then she said:

"Surely, papa, it can do no harm for me to give the date of my birth;' then fixing her eyes wistfully on my face, and with lips that quivered painfully, she added, "I was born October 24th, 1843.'

"My child and Richard Forrester's—my little blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, that her father named Editha for the happiness she brought him—was born October 24th, 1843.

"My love, did no one ever tell you that you resembled Richard Forrester?' I asked, gathering her close in my arms, for I knew she was mine, and I would never relinquish her again, unless, after hearing my story, she should refuse to acknowledge me as her mother.

"Yes, it was often remarked,' she returned; 'but mamma always said it was not strange since Uncle Richard was her brother.'

"Not "Uncle Richard" any longer, my darling,' I said, 'but your own father.'

"My father! and you were his wife—you are my mother?' she said, studying my face, and trembling in every nerve.

"It is a falsehood! Editha, leave the room instantly, and I will deal with these people myself. Go, I say; that woman is no fit companion for my daughter!' Mr. Dalton shouted, and strode toward me, his hands clenched and his face blazing with fury.

"Whatever his intentions were, he never reached me, for the blood all at once gushed from his mouth, and he fell fainting to the floor.

"Of course everything was at once forgotten in the confusion that followed and the alarm occasioned by his condition. He had a very violent hemorrhage, and the doctor gave very little hope of his rallying; but his constitution was strong, and after a couple of weeks he began to gain strength and flesh, and the physicians then said, with the exercise of great care he might live for a good while. Meantime, Editha and I clung to each other with all the fondness and delight it is possible for a long-parted mother and child to experience. There was no doubt in our own minds that we belonged to each other, although Mr. Dalton was still very sullen and morose on the subject, and would confess nothing. But one day he was attacked with another bleeding turn, so severe that we all knew he could not live long, and he seemed conscious himself that he could not rally from it. Then he seemed willing to talk upon the subject so fraught with interest to us all. Editha sought him one day, and begged him to tell her all the truth. Then he confessed that it was all as I had supposed, and that the moment he saw me at Newport he knew me from a picture that he had once seen in Mr. Forrester's possession. He said that when my husband returned from Europe with his little child he took her directly to his sister, who had no children, and begged her to adopt it as her own. He told all the story of his marriage and the sad events which followed it, and said he never wished his child to know that any sorrow was connected with her early life; he wished her to grow up happy and free from all care, and he would gladly forego the comfort of calling her his own, that no shadow need ever come upon her. In return for the consent of Mr. and Mrs. Dalton to adopt her, he settled upon them fifty thousand dollars, and promised them that Editha should have all his fortune if she outlived him.

"His reason told him that Richard Forrester would gladly have absolved him from all promise of secrecy regarding her birth, rather than that her life should be ruined, as it was likely to be upon discovering that you were his son; but his

enmity toward you made him prefer to sacrifice her happiness rather than forego his revenge."

"What a disposition for a person to cherish! It is beyond my comprehensions," Earle said, gravely, and thinking sorrowfully of the dying man upstairs, whose whole life had been ruined by giving the rein to his evil passions.

"It would seem, too, as if there ought to have been some natural instinct in his heart that would at least have prevented him from doing you such despite, even if he bore you no love," madam returned. "But, as he says," she added, "he has been his own worst enemy—out of his own folly alone have sprung all his misfortunes and disappointments."

"That is true, and is it not often proved that those who seek to wrong others only injure themselves the most in the end?" Earle asked.

"It is, indeed," madam returned, sadly; then she said, rising: "I believe I have told you all now. I think Editha must be awake by this time. I will go and tell her of your arrival. You will find her a little worn and pale perhaps, but not a whit less lovely than she was a year ago."

Madam's smile was full of beauty and tenderness whenever she spoke of her newly-found daughter, and Earle thought she was a very handsome woman.

She left the room, and he sat thinking over all the strange incidents of the past six years—yea, all the strange incidents of his whole life.

The story he had just listened to seemed wonderful to him. He could scarcely credit the good news that was to blot out all the dark past and make his future so bright and full of joy.

Notwithstanding he had come to a house upon which death had set its seal, and he could not help a feeling of sorrow for the man so near the bounds of eternity, yet his heart was bounding with a new and blessed hope.

He no longer needed to school himself to calmly endure the ordeal of meeting Editha; there was no need now to force back with an iron will all the natural impulses of his heart.

She was not his sister, and he knew well now why his whole soul had revolted against the fiendish lie with which Sumner Dalton had sought to crush him.

Editha would be his wife now; she would go back with him to Wycliffe when they should be needed here no longer; she would go there to reign as his honored and beautiful mistress, and he would have the right to love her; there

was no sin now in loving her as fondly as his great, true heart prompted him to do.

His face grew luminous as he sat there and waited for her; his eyes lost their heavy look of forced endurance, and softened into rare, sweet tenderness.

“After the shower, the tranquil sun—
Silver stars when the day is done.
After the knell, wedding bells,
Joyful greetings from sad farewells.”

Earle hummed this little verse, with a fond smile wreathing his handsome lips, his glad heart beating time to its hopeful rhythm, as he listened to catch the first sound of the footfalls he so loved.

Editha Dalton—so called since the first year of her babyhood—was indeed the child of Richard Forrester and Madam Sylvester, or Mrs. Forrester, as she must henceforth be called, and only a few words will be needed to give an outline of his early life.

While he was quite young a maiden aunt had died, leaving him heir to a handsome fortune. As soon as he had completed his college course he made the acquaintance of Estelle Sylvester.

He loved her from the very first, and though he thought her a trifle giddy and wild, he laid it to the fact that French people are naturally vivacious and freer in their manners than the staid, Puritanic Americans, and he reasoned that when she should marry and assume the responsibilities of domestic life, she would sober down into the quiet, self-possessed matron.

For a year after their marriage, as we have said, all went well—indeed, the wild and giddy Estelle became too quiet and sedate to suit him; but that he attributed to the state of her health somewhat. But when, on the fatal morning of Louis Villemain's return, he learned the truth that his wife had never loved him, but that her heart had been wholly another's even when she had vowed to love him only until death, he was crushed for the moment; then his fiery temper gained the ascendancy, and, for the time, made almost a madman of him, and he uttered words which in his calmer moments he would never have spoken.

Upon his return one evening, after a day of solitude and of brooding over his injury, finding his wife and child gone, he was for the instant tempted to put an end to his life, but a wise hand stayed the rash act.

All night long he mourned for the lost ones—for he had loved his wife tenderly, and his baby had been his idol—with a bitterness which only strong natures like his can experience; but when morning broke, and he began to consider the dishonor that would fall upon him, his passion flamed anew, and when poor, penitent Estelle returned at noon, his heart was like a wall of brass to her entreaties and prayers for forgiveness.

He was sorry afterward, bitterly sorry, when he came to reflect on his rashness, and that all her life-long his child must be motherless; but the deed was done—he had driven his wife away in disgrace, and he would not relent enough to recall her.

He took his baby and her nurse, and sailed immediately for the United States. His sister was about changing her home to a distant city, and to her care he committed his little Editha, to be brought up as her own, deeming it wiser to renounce all claim to her than that she should grow up to know of her mother's folly and sin.

That was what those strange words meant that he uttered upon the night before he died, when his eyes fondly followed Editha from the room, and he had said: "God grant that *that* sin may never shadow *her* life."

After the death of his parents he had left his native town and repaired to the city where his sister, Mrs. Dalton, resided, that he might be near and watch over his child, whom he loved almost to idolatry.

He never sought to obtain a divorce from Estelle, nor cared to marry again; his trust in woman was destroyed, and he lived only to make Editha happy, and amass a fortune to leave her at his death.

How well he succeeded in this we all know; her life up to his death was like a cloudless summer's day: she had never known a care or a sorrow that he had not lightened; she had never shed a tear in his presence that he had not wiped with the utmost tenderness away.

Aside from what might be considered his unreasonableness and harshness toward his young and erring wife, he was a noble, tender-hearted, upright man, beloved and respected to an unusual degree by all who knew him.

His was a singularly sad and isolated life, brightened only by the occasional presence of the child he dare not own, lest he bring a blight on her otherwise sunny life.

While he lived, Sumner Dalton had not dared to treat her in any but the most gentle and tender manner. She might oppose him in any way that her imperious little will

dictated, but he could only hide his anger and irritability by laughing at her wilfulness. But once Richard Forrester's surveillance removed, his natural tyranny and cruelty came to the surface, causing her much of sadness and suffering, while he even dared to risk her life and happiness to gratify his ignoble passion for revenge upon another.

CHAPTER XLVII

EDITHA'S GREETING

FIFTEEN minutes after Madam Forrester left Earle a light step sounded outside the door, a trembling hand turned the silver handle, and Editha Forrester stood once more in the presence of her lover.

She was somewhat pale and worn, as madam had said; but a lovely flush of expectation and delight had crept into her cheeks, and a joyous light gleamed from her beautiful eyes, as Earle leaped to his feet and went forward to meet her.

No word was spoken for the first few moments—their feelings were too deep, too sacred, for any outward expression; but Earle drew her to his breast and held her there with a strong, tender clasp that claimed her his own forever—that told her they would nevermore be parted while both should live.

Editha was the first to break the significant silence.

"Earle, I am *glad* you have come," she said, as she raised her eyes shining with happy tears to read the face she loved so well.

It was the same simple yet hearty greeting that she had given him so long ago on that day before Christmas, when he had come to her. Earle remembered it, and drew her still closer as he thought of her constancy to him through all the various changes of the last four years.

"The wings of the wind were not rapid enough to bear me to you, my own, when I knew that you wanted me; and yet I did not dream of the joy that was awaiting me," he said, with tremulous gladness.

"Joy and sorrow too, Earle, for papa cannot remain with us long," she answered, with a sigh.

She still called Mr. Dalton by the old familiar name, for not only would it have been awkward to change, but it

would have seemed cruel to the invalid, who in all the world had alone this fair girl to cling to.

But in her heart she thanked God every day that Richard Forrester had been her father instead of Sumner Dalton, while no words could express her joy for the loving mother she had found.

"Yes, it pains me to find him as he is," Earle returned, in answer to her remark; but he was thinking more of his spiritual condition than of his physical suffering.

"He is very sorry for the past," Editha said, with a wistful look; "he talks of it almost constantly in his sleep in a wild, sad way, although he speaks bitterly when he is awake. He begs Marion—that was your mother, Earle—to forgive him, and tells her that he did not see things then as he does now. I think she would forgive him now if she could see him; and, Earle, I wish you could forgive him, too. Oh, if you could part at peace with each other!"

"We can, my darling. I have never wished him any ill, and freely forgive him every wrong; though, of course, it cannot be expected that I could feel any affection for him," Earle replied, gravely.

"No—oh, no."

"And my mother's wrongs were very grievous."

"I know," Editha said, with a deep sigh of regret, as she thought of that delicate, lovely girl, and what torture she must have endured when she believed herself betrayed and scorned.

"Editha, can *you* forgive Mr. Dalton for all he has wilfully made you suffer—for trying to part us when there was no need, and for seeking to hide you from your mother?" Earle asked, regarding her curiously.

The tears sprang to her eyes as she answered:

"Oh, yes; he is dying, you know, and I could not let him leave me feeling that I cherished any bitterness toward him. His path to the grave is very dark, and I would not add to its gloom. It has been very hard to bear all those things," she added, sighing; "but I think papa has been the worst sufferer, after all. He never was unkind to me until after my dear father died. Oh, Earle," she cried, her lovely face lighting up with tenderness, "you don't know how I love to think that he was my father—I loved him so dearly. I used to think sometimes that I was really ungrateful to love him so very much when he was only my uncle; but now I know why it was—it was the natural impulse of my heart going out to him, where it belonged."

"How like a romance the story of your life is, my darling," Earle said, thoughtfully.

"Not more so than your own, I am quite sure, Earle. But do you not think mother is very lovely?" she asked.

"She is, truly. How very happy you are in the knowledge of your parentage."

"Yes; and for more reasons than one," she answered, with a shy smile at him, accompanied with a rosy blush; then she added, more gravely: "But I wish my mother need not have suffered quite so deeply. If my father could but have known how sorry and repentant she was, and how truly good she was at heart, they might have grown to be very happy after awhile; he need not have lived such a lonely, sorrowful life, and all this sin and trouble need never have been. But"—with a sigh of regret—"we have no right to question the dealings of One who is wiser than we. There is some good reason for all the suffering there is in the world, and some one has somewhere said that 'human lives are like some sweet plants, which must be crushed ere they give forth their sweetest fragrance.'"

"And we are told somewhere else that gold seven times tried is pure. How very free from dross, then, you must be, my darling," Earle said, with playful tenderness.

"No, indeed, Earle; my trials and sorrows have been nothing compared to yours," Editha said, earnestly.

"The bitterness of the past disappears in the brightness of the present, and what the future promises to be; and I do not forget, my darling, that but for your fortitude a dark shadow would still rest upon my life—you endured a great deal for my sake, Editha," and his lips touched her forehead almost reverently.

"And I would have resisted until I died rather than have given up my treasure into the hands of that wicked man," she cried, with something of the old wilful gleam in her eyes. "Do you know," she added, eagerly, in the same breath, "that I have found the Lokers, and they are now just as comfortable as they can be."

"And all owing to your own kindness of heart and liberal hand, no doubt," Earle responded, with a smile.

"How could I help expressing my gratitude in some way for having that dark mystery solved and every stigma removed from your character? I did help them to begin with, but they are going to help themselves now. I stocked a cunning little store with fancy and useful articles, furnished two rooms in the rear for their private use, and they are really very successful in their little business."

"With you for their chief patron, I presume," was Earle's laughing reply, as he gazed admiringly into her animated face.

"Well, of course, I go there," she admitted, flushing, "to get all my needles, pins, thread, etc., and so do a great many of my friends. But Mrs. Loker is really a very worthy woman, and her daughter is bright and keen as a brier at a trade; it is a real pleasure to encourage such people. But I have talked enough about myself—tell me something about your adventure with that wicked creature who has brought so much trouble upon us."

Earle complied, relating all that had occurred from the night of the attempted robbery until the time of his departure, while Editha listened intensely interested.

"Do you know I stand almost in awe of you to know that you have accomplished such a change in that vile nature? It seems almost like a miracle," she said, when he had finished.

"Do not think of it, then, for I have no wish, I assure you, to inspire you with any such sentiment toward me. But I do not think this looks as if you were *very* much afraid of me," he laughed, as he gathered her closer in his arms and kissed the fair face upon his breast again and again.

"I shall be obliged to impose a duty upon all such operations in the future if you carry them to such an extent," she said, trying to hide her blushing face with a very insufficient hand.

"Then never tell me again that you stand in awe of me, or I shall feel it *my* duty to take even more effective measures to eradicate the feeling," Earle said, with mock gravity.

"But about this man"—Editha thought it best to change the subject—"don't you think you're carrying your kindness a little too far? He may betray your trust; besides, he has violated the laws of the land, and have you any right to shield him?"

"I suppose I am not obliged to give any evidence against him, since he was not arrested by a commissioned officer; the offense was against myself alone, and if I see fit to take no action in the matter, I do not see how I am violating any right, either civil or moral—particularly as I am conscientiously convinced that the man's salvation depends upon kindness rather than upon punishment."

Earle had argued this matter many times with himself, and he felt that he was doing perfectly right.

"If suffering is any penalty for sin," he continued, "he has paid it, for he was fearfully wounded. I fully believe, if he had escaped unharmed from the bullet, and been arrested, convicted and sentenced, he would have grown more hardened and desperate, and been prepared for almost any evil upon the expiration of his term. But laid upon a bed of sickness, with some one to care for him and treat him as if he was a human being, he has had opportunity to think as he has never thought before. As Mr. Dalton said to-day, 'things look very different to a man when he fears that life is slipping from his grasp than they do when he is in the full vigor of life,' and I think Tom Drake realized that, if ever a man did. He was not easily won—he was suspicious of me and my motives for a long time, but when he found that I would take no measures against him he was completely staggered; and the shock which his hitherto benumbed conscience thus received restored it to something like its normal condition. I believe he will do well, and, as long as he does, I shall give him my support and confidence."

"But didn't you feel the least bit triumphant when he lay there powerless before you?" Editha asked.

"I cannot say that I did not experience a sense of satisfaction in knowing that at last one so deserving of justice and so steeped in crime had been arrested in his career. But my first thought was, 'Are my hands stained with the life-blood of a fellow-being?' It was a great relief when I discovered that he was not mortally wounded, but my anxiety returned when he was so sick and we thought he would die."

"It was a great care for you, Earle, and a noble thing for you to do after suffering all you have on his account," Editha said, her heart swelling with pride of her noble lover.

"You know the more care any one occasions us the more interest we naturally feel in that one," he answered, smiling at her praise; "and so it was in this case. I saw the man was capable of better things; he is naturally smart, and I longed to save him despite the injury he had done me and others. If there was one thing harder than all the rest for me to forgive, it was his treatment of you. Will it be agreeable to you, dearest, to see him about the place when we go home?" he asked, seeing the shiver which crept involuntarily over her at the mention of the past.

Editha flushed involuntarily at the mention of going "home," but she said, with gentle gravity:

"No, Earle; if we can save him, I can conquer the re-

pugnance that I have hitherto felt for him; but, as I remember him, he seems perfectly hideous to me."

"He does not look nearly so repulsive since his sickness; he is, of course, much thinner and more refined in appearance, while his expression is wholly changed."

"Whether he is changed or not, I will join you heart and hand in any good thing you may wish to do for him," she said, heartily.

"What a gentle mistress Wycliffe will have," Earle said, fondly; "and you will not refuse to go back with me this time?"

"No, Earle; only it must not be at present, you know," she returned, with some sadness.

"I do know, dear, and of course shall remain as long as Mr. Dalton may need either you or me; but, oh! my darling, you cannot tell how thankful I am that I am not doomed to spend my life in gloom and alone; everything has looked so dreary and desolate to me until to-day."

Editha did not reply, but she laid her cheek against his in mute sympathy, and with a sigh that told him she had also experienced something of the desolateness of which he spoke.

"You have not seen Mr. Tressalia yet, I suppose?" she said, after a few minutes of silence.

"No, dear, I have not seen him since the day I had such a struggle with my selfishness, and sent him hither to win you and be happy if he could."

His arm tightened around the slight form at his side as he said this, and Editha knew how he must have suffered in that struggle to renounce her so utterly.

"Did *you* send him to me, Earle?" she asked, with a startled look.

"Yes, dear; Paul Tressalia is one of earth's noblest men. I believed you lost to me forever. You once told me if there had been no Earle Wayne in the world, you might have loved him. I wanted you to be happy—I wanted him to know something of the comfort of life, and I knew of no one whom I would rather have win a sister of mine than him. It was a miserable kind of an arrangement all round, but I knew of nothing better."

Earle spoke with a tinge of the bitterness he had experienced at the time, as if even the memory of it was exceedingly painful.

"Dear Earle, you might have known it could not be," she whispered, sliding one hand into his and dropping her flushed face upon his shoulder.

"Never—not even if our relations had remained as we have believed them to be?"

"Never," she replied, decidedly. "I *could* not change, even though I believed I was sinning every day of my life, and I would not wrong him by accepting his love when I had none to give him in return."

"Editha, my beloved, I should crown you with passion-flowers and snow-drops for your devotion and faithfulness," Earle breathed, in low, intense tones, and deeply moved by her confession.

"Hush!" she said, releasing herself from his encircling arms, her face like a carnation; "there is the bell—that is Mr. Tressalia; he has heard of the arrival of a steamer, and has come to see if you are here;" and she arose to go, feeling that she could not be present while they met.

Earle arose, too, surmising her thought, but gently detained her a moment longer.

"My love—my Editha—my '*happiness*,' you have not yet told me that you are glad to be my wife, and go home with me to Wycliffe; let me hear you say it once," he pleaded, with grave earnestness, as he studied the beautiful face intently.

"You know that I am glad, Earle;" and the clear, truthful eyes were raised to his with a look that satisfied him, though the conscious crimson dyed all her fair face.

"And there will be no regret at leaving your native land?" he persisted, his whole being thrilling with the consciousness of her pure love.

"Not one, save the lonely graves I shall leave behind and would like to visit occasionally," she murmured, with a starting tear, as she thought of Richard Forrester and his sister sleeping so quietly side by side in Greenwood, and of that other grave that must soon be made beside them.

Earle lifted the sweet face and kissed the tremulous lips with infinite tenderness, then releasing her, she slipped from the room by one door as Paul Tressalia entered by another.

The greeting of the two young men was cordial and friendly, although each felt a thrill of pain as they clasped hands and realized all that that meeting meant to them.

Each knew that as soon as Mr. Dalton should be laid away Earle would claim Editha as his wife, and take her back to reign in the home of his ancestors, where, doubtless, a life of joy, such as falls to the lot of few, would be spent.

But Paul Tressalia was not a man to sit weakly down and pine for what he could not have.

Since that day when he had pleaded his suit for the last

time with Editha, and she had in her despair cried out for a friend, strong and true, he had bravely set himself to work to conquer the hopeless passion in his heart, and he had already learned to look upon his future with a calmness at which he himself at times was surprised.

He came to-day as both Earle's and Editha's tried and trusted friend, and the congratulations which he tendered the former had a ring of heartiness in them not to be questioned for a moment.

CHAPTER XLVIII

EARLE'S BEAUTIFUL THEORY

SUMNER DALTON lingered only a little more than a week after Earle's arrival.

But with his mind relieved of the burden of revenge so long cherished, and of the secret which had threatened to ruin Editha's life—with his hate confessed, and his evil passions burned out—he grew quieter and more at ease, even though he knew that he must enter the dark valley very soon.

He had talked with Earle once again regarding the past, seeming anxious to know something of Marion's last days, and appeared much agitated when, with as little reflection upon him as possible, he gave a short account of her sorrowful, secluded life, and her calm resignation in the hour of death.

Earle knew that he longed to be assured of his forgiveness for the bitter wrongs of which he had been guilty, and yet deemed it a mockery to crave it; but he knew that it would comfort him inexpressibly, and he told him one day that he accorded it fully and freely, and begged him to seek pardon also from a higher source.

Whether he did or not they never knew, for he avoided referring to anything that bore upon the past from that time; but he grew comparatively peaceful, and they hoped that he had obtained mercy from the divine Healer of souls.

He seemed more content when Earle was in his room, and lay and watched him by the hour, a wistful look in his sunken eyes, as if all too late he realized what a crown to his life such a son would have been.

Together Earle and Editha watched beside him, until the flame of life burned down to its socket and then went out,

and with it every spark of feeling (save that of regret for a life that seemed to have been so spent in vain) expired from their hearts also.

They laid him beside his wife, and placed above him a costly marble shaft, simply inscribed with his name, age, and the date of his death. What more could they do?

Unloving and unloved he had lived, unlamented he had died, without one grand or noble act to crown his life or to be remembered when he was gone.

What a record! and sad enough for tears "such as angels weep."

Editha and her mother went together to Richard Forrester's grave—Editha with a strange, sad yearning for the father she had never known as such while he lived, and madam with a heart filled with deep regret for the past, and for the noble life she had so saddened by one rash act.

But each felt, as they turned away from the sacred spot, that could he have spoken, he would have blessed them both, and rejoiced with them in their new-found joy and reunion.

* * * * *

Three weeks later there was a quiet wedding one morning in the fine old church where Editha had been wont to attend since her earliest remembrance.

Notwithstanding that Editha had desired everything done with as little ostentation as possible, on account of their recent bereavement, yet the church had been elegantly decorated by her numerous friends, many of whom were present, with no small degree of curiosity, to witness the ceremony that made her the Marchioness of Wycliffe.

The wedding breakfast was a very informal affair, to which only her most intimate friends had been bidden.

Of course Mr. Felton, the trusty lawyer, was among these, and with him a quiet, matronly woman, whom he had found thus late in life to share the remainder of his journey; and into his hands Editha's beautiful home was to pass upon her departure for England.

John Loker's wife and daughter, both neatly and tastefully clad, were also among the favored guests; and, looking into their cheerful countenances, one would scarce have recognized the wretched beings whom Editha had visited on that memorable night two years previous.

The fair bride's wedding robes were of heavy white crape, with satin facings, while the mist-like veil which floated from her golden hair was fastened with fragrant lilies of the valley and delicate, feathery cypress vine.

"So appropriate under the circumstances," murmured the admiring friends who had gathered to do honor to the occasion; and indeed the fair-haired, blue-eyed girl had never looked more lovely than when she stood at the altar in her pure white raiment, and plighted her vows to the one to whom she had been so true through the dark hours of adversity as well as in prosperity.

She had loved him while yet a poor boy serving in her father's office; she had loved and bravely defended him when he stood before the judge and was unjustly condemned, and during the three weary years that followed; and the depth of that love she testified when she almost sacrificed her life to preserve his character from dishonor. Not less did she love him now, as he stood by her side, grand noble, and honored by all, as the Marquis of Wycliffe and Viscount Wayne, and possessor of a proud inheritance—an old and honored name.

But she would have loved him just as fondly, she would have wedded him just as proudly, had he been simple Earle Wayne, without a dollar in his pocket or a foot of land, save what his own strong right arm had won for himself.

It was the noble spirit, the stainless character, the firm, unwavering rectitude and honor that had won her heart's devotion; and yet his position and wealth were not valueless in her sight; they were accessories by which they would be enabled to make more perfect and useful the life which God had given them.

"If I live I mean to make my life foursquare," he had said, with quiet determination, when he had come to her from his weary prison life; and she had never forgotten the resolute words—they had rung in her ears ever since like a watch-word. And to-day, as she stood at his side and spoke those solemn vows, she thought of them again, and she prayed that together they might live a life so perfect and complete that it should be like that "golden city whose length, and breath, and height were equal."

"So exceedingly romantic. Who would have thought it?" was the comment of not a few who had been rehearsing the incidents of the past six or seven years, but were interrupted as the distinguished bridal party passed up the broad aisle to the altar.

Gustave Sylvester was to give away the bride, while Madam Forrester, very handsome, in mauve-colored moire, Spanish lace, and diamonds, came in on the arm of Paul Tressalia, who was by no means the least distinguished—

looking one of the party, though his face might have been thought much too pale and stern for a wedding.

Earle met them at the altar, very quiet and self-possessed, but with a luminous light in his eyes that told of the depth of the joy in his heart.

After the wedding breakfast this party of five bade a long farewell to their guests and friends, and departed for the steamer that was to bear them to their beautiful home on England's shores.

* * * * *

Three years have passed, and we will take just one peep at the domestic life at Wycliffe before we, too, part with them for all time.

The great mansion, the pride of all the country around, with its wide wings on either side, stands on a slight eminence, and is grand and imposing in appearance.

It was built in the Tudor style of architecture, with massive carvings and ornamentations, and was a home of which any man, however great, might have been proud.

An extensive lawn spread out in front, and was decorated here and there with patches and borders of landscape gardening, beautiful shrubbery, fountains, and statuary, while beyond and to the right of this was the park, with its noble trees, its deer and game.

Magnificent beeches, elms, and maples spread their lofty, protecting arms above and around the mansion, lending a delightful shade, and making a pleasing contrast with the brown-stone of the dwelling.

Beneath one of these trees there might have been seen, on a certain summer's day, an exceedingly attractive group, and, to all appearances, a very happy one also.

Upon a graceful rustic seat there are sitting two beautiful women.

Editha, fair and lovely as of old, no cloud to dim the blue of her sunny eyes, no care or trouble having left a line on her white brow. She is a trifle more matronly in her appearance, has a bit more of dignity, perhaps, but is otherwise unchanged. Her companion is a lady of perhaps thirty-two or three years, whose face impresses one at once with its expression of sweetness and gentleness. It is a face that we have seen before, and that once seen could never be forgotten.

The lady is none other than the one we have known as Miss Isabelle Grafton, the daughter of Bishop Grafton, that good old man who married Earle's mother.

Standing behind her, his eyes resting with peculiar fond-

ness upon her face, is a noble-appearing man. It is Paul Tressalia, her husband of a few months.

Madam's prophecy had come true, and he had at last found the "woman whom he should marry," and they are as quietly, calmly happy as they could ever hope to be in this world, neither feeling, perhaps, the fervor of a first passion, but loving earnestly and with an enduring affection that would grow riper with every year.

It was this gentle woman's face that had come, unbidden, to Paul Tressalia's mind on that day when madam had told him that he would yet find one good and true who would fill the wants of his nature better than Editha could ever do.

A year after his return to England they had met again; each had attracted the other, and out of it had grown the union, which bade fair to be a most happy one.

At Editha's feet there is playing a dark-eyed, noble-looking boy of two years—little Paul, the future Marquis of Wycliffe; while an old lady, of perhaps sixty, sits at a respectful distance and watches with her heart in her eyes his every movement, lest he should annoy "my lady" with his play and his constant prattle. This latter is Tom Drake's mother. A short distance away there paces back and forth under the trees a white-aproned, white-capped nurse, with a fair-haired, blue-eyed little girl in her arms—the "small Lady Isabelle" she is called, being as yet only three months old, and of very tiny though perfect proportions.

The only remaining one of this group—Madam Forrester—reclines in a chair a little in the background. She is as handsome and attractive as ever, with a tranquil joy in her face that bespeaks very little to wish for even in this world. Her white shapely hands are busied with some dainty piece of work destined to grace the "small ladyship," who is her particular pride and comfort, while every now and then she joins in the conversation carried on chiefly by Editha and Paul Tressalia and his wife.

Down the broad drive-way at some distance, and approaching slowly, are two men.

One glance is sufficient to tell us which is Earle—there is no mistaking his grand proportions, his upright form, with its noble head setting square and firm and with manly dignity upon his broad shoulders.

He is evidently giving some directions to his companion, for they stop every now and then while Earle points here and there, and then resumes his way.

As they draw nearer the group under the beech, it is

noticeable that his companion is slightly lame, and as they reach the spot he lifts his hat respectfully to Editha, smiles fondly into the eyes of the old lady who is watching Earle's boy, and then passes on.

It is none other than Tom Drake, once the midnight robber and abductor.

Before Earle's return he was able to be about once more, and had made himself acquainted with much pertaining to the estate.

He had worked diligently and with great interest over the accounts Earle had left him, and unheeding the admonitions of his mother, who had arrived a few days after his departure, he refused to leave them until every figure was straightened.

He had taken it upon himself to superintend the decorations of the mansion and grounds, when Earle had telegraphed on what day he should arrive at Wycliffe with his bride, and a scene of almost bewildering beauty greeted their home-coming.

It was made a day of general rejoicing, the tenantry, servants, and laborers all turning out in gala attire to give them a glorious reception and welcome to Wycliffe.

But Tom Drake had remained in the background while all others went forward to tender their good wishes and congratulations, and it was not until Earle asked particularly for him that he ventured to present himself before those two, whose lives he had done so much to render miserable. Then he came modestly forward, bearing a magnificent bouquet and wreath in his hand.

The former composed entirely of box, while bell-flowers, and blue violets, and embodying the sentiments, constancy, gratitude, and faithfulness, he placed in Earle's hand, wishing him "long life and happiness." The wreath, a marvel of delicate beauty, was made of the finest leaves of yew tree and graceful clusters of pure white wisteria, the leaves signifying sorrow for the past, the flowers "Welcome, fair stranger."

This Tom Drake laid at the feet of Editha, with a few murmured words of greeting, made a low obeisance, and then went away.

Both Earle and his wife were surprised at this manifestation of feeling, and the delicate manner in which it was expressed; and they prized these simple offerings as highly as any of the rich gifts that they had received from their numerous wealthy friends, on account of the emotions which

had prompted them and which they had been quick to read and appreciate.

Earle was so pleased with his work upon the tangled accounts, and the interest he manifested in things generally, that he allowed him in the future to assist the steward, who was quite old, and, upon the death of that individual, which occurred about two years after their return, Tom was so well versed in all his duties, and had proved himself so faithful and trustworthy, that he elected him as his successor. He had lost very much of the ruffian-like appearance that had made him so repulsive to Editha, and was now very quiet and unostentatious in his manner.

The unsightly scar, of course, still remained upon his face, but his expression told of a firm resolve to conquer himself and become the man that Earle desired.

He was lame in the limb that had been wounded, and probably always would be, but Earle never looks at him without a thrill of thankfulness that he was impressed to pursue the course that he has with him, and believes him to be a lasting monument to the power of kindness.

Tom and his mother live in a pretty cottage, covered with climbing woodbine and clematis, and situated only a short distance from the mansion.

Both mother and son idolize my lady, who is kind and gracious to them, and old Mrs. Drake is often seen, as to-day, caring for Earle's noble boy, "the like of which," she fondly declares, "was never born before."

Editha arose as Earle approached, the smile upon her lips and the tender light in her eyes bespeaking the glad welcome in her heart.

"You are late, dear," she said, slipping her white hand within his arm.

"A little; but you have plenty of pleasant company," Earle replied, with a smile, as his eyes wandered over the group.

The look that the fair wife flashed up at him from her lovely eyes plainly told him that no company, however pleasant, was quite like his—no group complete to her without him.

Earle stooped and picked up his boy, which had toddled to his side, and gave him a toss on high that made the little fellow clap his hands with delight, and the air rang with his happy, childish laughter.

"Earle, I have been trying to explain to Isabelle your theory of the golden city," said Editha, when Master Paul had become quiet once more; "but I've only made a bungle of it, and you will have to interpret yourself."

"I presume Mrs. Tressalia would not agree with me in my ideas regarding the revelation," Earle said, with a smile, as he turned to that lady. "There is so much that seems visionary and mystical in it, that none of us can fully understand or explain it, but *whatever* lessons we may draw from it can do us no harm. As for the 'city which lieth four-square, whose length, breadth, and height are equal,' it seems to *me* more like the symbol of a perfected life than like the description of a literal city."

"I had never thought of it in that light before," Mrs. Tressalia said, thoughtfully.

"If we make the height and breath of our life equal with its length, it cannot fail to be perfect and of faultless symmetry, can it?" asked the young marquis.

"What constitutes the height and breadth of a life as you express it?" Mrs. Tressalia queried.

"The height," Earle replied, his eyes resting earnestly on the far-off purple and crimson clouds of the western sky, as if beyond them he could almost distinguish that golden symbol of which he was speaking—"the height is attained only by a continued reaching upward of the finite for the infinite; the breadth, by the constant practice of that divine charity or love and self-denial as taught by the Man of Sorrows while He dwelt on earth—at least, this is my idea of it. This aspiration after holiness, this daily practice of the divine commands, if followed as long as one lives, cannot fail to make his being one of faultless symmetry in the end, and fit to be measured by the 'golden reed of the angel.'"

"Yours is a beautiful theory," Mrs. Tressalia said, a mist gathering in her soft eyes; "and yet, after all, I do not feel that I can quite agree with you. I have always believed that chapter of revelation describes the heavenly city in which we are to dwell when we leave this earth. It is a more tangible idea to me, and I think I like it better than your theory on that account."

"You believe in the literal city, pure and holy; I in a state or existence of a like nature. Whichever is the correct belief, it cannot fail of attaining one and the same result—eternal happiness," Earle said, with his rare smile.

"That is true; but if you do not believe in the literal city, what do you make the foundations, 'garnished with precious stones,' to mean?"

Mrs. Tressalia was deeply interested in his ideas, even if she did not fully agree with them.

"I fear if I should try to explain all my theory regard-

ing it, it would involve us in an endless discussion," Earle said. "The garnishing of precious stones *may* mean the cultivation of those many virtues spoken of by the apostle Paul—such as love, peace, long suffering, gentleness, etc. Surely those are precious jewels that every one would like to possess."

"Sonny boy, if *you* square *your* life by your father's rule, you'll not lack for symmetry in the sight of God when you come into the 'golden city,'" muttered Tom Drake's mother, with fast-dropping tears, as she bent fondly over little Paul, whom she had taken from his father's arms. Earle smiled good-naturedly as he caught the low-spoken words, for he knew that in the grateful old creature's eyes he lacked no good thing in all the catalogue of virtues.

"That is so," said Paul Tressalia, who had also heard her; "and whether Earle's theory is the correct one or not, it can never harm one to put it in practice, particularly if it attains to that nobility which has become so rooted and grounded in his character," and the look of affectionate admiration which he bestowed upon his kinsman testified to the heartiness of his words.

We cannot follow them further, but we have learned enough to tell us something of the principles of goodness and purity which dwelt in that charming household, and which could not fail to ennoble and elevate all by whom they were surrounded.

Who, like Earle Wayne, would not like to make his life foursquare? Who, although he may never attain to the worldly greatness which fell to his life, would not seek to attain that better nobility of character, which, when measured by the "golden reed of the angel," will be found of faultless symmetry, like the city whose "length, and breadth, and height are equal?"

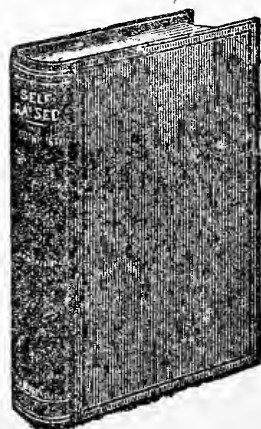
What wouldst thou of life?
Love, purity, freedom from strife;
Bless'd virtues, in which heaven is rife;
"The victor's crown, the conqueror's meed,"
The perfect measure of the Golden Reed.

THE END.

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